

A horizontal decorative border at the top of the page, featuring a series of stylized floral or star-like motifs.

# A DOUBLE WEDDING

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
ST OLAVE'S

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A DOUBLE WEDDING.

VOL. III.







E. T. Stephenson

# A DOUBLE WEDDING

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“ST. OLAVE’S,” “JANITA’S CROSS,” “ANNETTE,”  
ETC. ETC.

“We must not any way  
Forget our lady who is gone from us.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.  
VOL. III.

LONDON:  
HURST AND BLACKETT, LIMITED,  
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1888.

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# A DOUBLE WEDDING.

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## CHAPTER I.

WE never seemed to be the same again after my sister Anne's marriage.

For one thing, we were none of us enthusiastic about Mr. Berrithorne. Indeed I do not think Anne was enthusiastic about him herself. She had what might be called an affectionate love for him, rather than that passionate devotion which some would think essential to the perfection of married life. During the weeks of their short engagement, how calm and quiet she had been



about it. Having once convinced herself that what she was doing was the right thing, right both in the widened sphere of usefulness which it would bring and the permanence with which it would bind her to the work of my father's parish, she accepted all the rest with silent cheerfulness, never troubling other people with her own ups and downs, never making demands upon them for their sympathy or congratulation; caring only to do the thing that was her duty, and win in such manner her content. Seline called that uninteresting. I called it noble.

At the same time, I do not think that Anne's love for Mr. Berrithorne developed all the capacities of her nature. I dare not say she would have been a finer woman had she married a better man, but I am sure the sunlight of his love never ripened to their perfection the clustering fruits



which grew in the garden of her heart. There was so much in her which he could not reach. There was more still which he could not understand. His was a life very much absorbed in things temporal. Even those things which are eternal he looked at very much from their temporal side, and so his profession had not that ennobling influence upon him which it ought to have had. In listening to his preaching I always found myself thinking more of how he said a thing than of the thing itself, and I believe this was so, because in those days he himself thought more of his manner of delivering the message than of the message which had been given to him to deliver. He was essentially a man who lived in the opinions of other people.

Our hope that her marriage would make but little difference in the closeness of our intercourse with my sister, was destined to



a very speedy disappointment. And with that disappointment the foundation of many of our pleasant imaginings began to crumble away.

About a month after the wedding, whilst as yet the very mild festivities connected with the home-coming of the bride and bridegroom were in full force, Mr. Berrithorne came over to tell my father that he had decided to accept the offer of a curacy at Burstborough, and that he should like to be at liberty, according to previous stipulation, at the expiration of three months. Or, if my father could meet with a suitable man earlier, he should be glad at once to relinquish his present charge, as Mr. Macpherson, the vicar of St. Aidan's, whose curacy he had accepted, was anxious to secure his services at once.

I think this was a greater blow to all of



us than even Anne's engagement, because we could not help feeling that the move was not so unpremeditated as, by Mr. Berrithorne's own showing, it appeared. Taking into account sundry conversations I had had with him during my sister's absence at Dalton, conversations in which he had unconsciously manifested to me some of the mainsprings of his conduct, I rather suspected that this idea of the Burstborough curacy had been working in his mind ever since the preaching of those sermons for our new mission-room. It was the success of those sermons which had convinced him of his pulpit talent. He felt himself marked out for popularity. He could no longer be contented with a bucolic congregation. He must be able to give the reins to his imagination and fling out the burning sparks of his eloquence upon more combustible material than our



woolly shepherds, waggoners, and ploughmen. All well ; only he might have been more straightforward about it.

For this new curacy business also explained to us his reluctance, so strange at the time, to take a house and furnish a suitable home for my sister. I could but wish he had told us honestly what was the reason, instead of putting it on the ground of the greater convenience of being able to choose papers and curtains and such things, together afterwards. And did the Burstborough curacy, I wondered, also explain his eagerness for a speedy marriage, that eagerness which was so very puzzling when just before it he had shown an indisposition, rather than otherwise, to discuss any plans or arrangements ? Had he a lurking fear that neither Anne nor our parents would consent to such a summary removal from Willoughby, and that therefore he



had better make sure of both herself and her possessions before striking out a path into which she would not voluntarily have entered?

But I had to check myself, for I was becoming uncharitable. However, I kept my bitter thoughts to myself, and if my father and mother had any, they did the same.

Anne took it patiently, though I could see it was a great mortification to her. I use the word mortification advisedly, for to a girl of my sister's entirely upright and crystalline character, this sudden change showed either vacillation or design, and both must lessen her respect for her husband, however she might strive to preserve the outward appearance of it. Looked at apart from him, I do not think that short of those crushing strokes which go down to the very roots of existence, any trial could



have been appointed to her more severe than this of leaving us and leaving Willoughby. I am sure that had it been set before her at the first, as a necessary consequence of her engagement to Mr. Berri-thorne, she would never have become engaged to him at all; because she had not that overmastering love for him which can and will rise above everything, except a distinct moral fault in its object.

My father made no attempt to argue the matter. He neither reproached Mr. Berri-thorne for having concealed anything from us, nor endeavoured to change his purpose of leaving Willoughby. His perfect silence, both over the suddenness of the decision and the grief which it caused to himself, convinced us, more than any words could have done, how severely his confidence had been shaken. I think we all of us suffered more for him than for ourselves.



We felt that he was bearing in secret such a burden of disappointment.

My mother was not one who could hold her peace so steadfastly. When anything moved her she spoke out about it, and I think Mr. Berrithorne was made rather uncomfortable by the searching questions which she asked, relative to the rise and progress of this so-called unexpected change in his plans. Her speech, and my father's absence of it, must often have produced in him a guilty feeling; for though on the surface things looked plausible enough, still a little skilful cross-examination turned quite a different light upon them, and convinced us that the vicar of St. Aidan's and the curate of Willoughby had been in correspondence upon this very subject long before my sister's marriage.

However, for her sake, more than for Mr. Berrithorne's, there was no quarrel



about it. We gave to our friends what indeed was quite a sufficient explanation, namely, that Anne's husband had had the offer of the senior curacy at St. Aidan's, one of the most fashionable churches in Burstborough; and as he felt his usefulness would be increased by accepting it, and as his talents seemed to mark him out for town life, we sank our family preferences, and hoped that St. Aidan's would gain by our loss. Indeed, so far as mere outward circumstances went, the change might be considered as a matter for congratulation, the senior curacy of that church being one of the most envied clerical appointments in Burstborough; so that, except for our own private reasons, we were able to accept the position with more than cheerfulness. And the private reasons we could keep to ourselves, even as we kept our own bitter thoughts.



## CHAPTER II.

BUT Mrs. Dumble was by no means able to accept the position so cheerfully.

‘To think of it,’ she said, the next time I went down to the cottage, after the proposed change had been made known to her, ‘and just when I was saying to Jonathan how nice and comfortable we was all settled, because when we’d once started doing without t’other parlour, we never seemed to feel the want of it, except of a Sunday afternoon for him to have his sleep in. And I lay it’s a disappointment to your sister, Miss Marjorie, now isn’t it?’



I allowed as much as that. Indeed, we very frankly said to everyone that Mrs. Berrithorne made a great trouble of leaving Willoughby.

‘Ay, you needn’t tell me, and her born and bred here, and loving every blade o’ grass in the place. I know it’ll go to her very heart. If it had been me, Miss Marjorie, and Jonathan had offered such a thing as taking of me where I hadn’t a mind to go, he’d soon have found out which side the kettle boiled, that would he. But law, Miss Marjorie, Jonathan ’ud no more have done such a thing, than he’d have gone and flown off the church-steeple, and him nearly always lame with the rheumatics as he is. Jonathan never does nothing, Miss Marjorie, but he brings it to me first of all, for me to say what I think about it, even if it’s nothing no more than his coat to put a patch on, and he



says to me, now, Harriet Ann, he says, what do *you* think about it? And I tells him, and there's an end. He don't ever do nothing, doesn't Jonathan, but what he leaves it to me first to know if I'm agreeable. But maybe the quality's different. And how's the other young lady, as was wed same time with Miss Anne? I ask her pardon, Mrs. Berrithorne.'

'Mrs. Forrester?' I replied. 'Oh! she is very well indeed, and very happy. Mr. Forrester's house in the college grounds is beautiful. There are great mirrors between the windows that you can see yourself in from head to foot, and I hear that all the best people in Burstborough have called upon her.'

Mrs. Dumble gave a vicious dig to the counterpane she was washing, a dig which drove it right down amongst the suds, and sent a shower of splashes and rainbow-



coloured bubbles all over the back kitchen window.

‘Ay, there’s nought’ll please her better than that. A big looking-glass as she can view herself in, and plenty of fine people to go see her now she’s in her new wedding clothes. Well, there’s them that likes it, and I say let ’em have it that way. I don’t much matter her gentleman, Miss Marjorie. He’s over-masterful to my thinking, and she isn’t the sort to put up with that. She don’t know what giving-in means, doesn’t young madam, and yon gentleman at the school isn’t like my Jonathan. He’ll have his way, and he’ll take it, that will he, without so much as *with* your leave or *by* your leave. Howsomever, they’ve got that to settle betwixt themselves. And it’s Burstborough that Miss Anne, bless her ! is going to?’



I told her it was Burstborough, but not Miss Anne.

‘Listen to me! There I go again! I don’t do it so much, only to you, Miss Marjorie, for with seeing you the same I kind of forgets what a change there’s been, and I might know better waiting upon her as I do now, day in and day out. But I’m sorry for her, Miss Marjorie, that’s what I am. I know what a town life is when I was living with the Rev. Sparrington, afore I come to your ma, and a nicer gentleman one needn’t have wished for, nor a dismaller house to serve him in, all blacks and smuts as it was again as soon as you’d finished cleaning. He said nothing, because it was what he’d always been accustomed to, and he was a gentleman, too, was the Rev. Sparrington, as, if he got his victuals served comfortable, he never mat-



tered a little dirt in the rooms more or less. But I'm not one of that sort, Miss Marjorie, as your own mother can testify. Now, can't she ?'

I said my mother could testify abundantly. It was one of Mrs. Dumble's peculiarities that, when bespeaking absent testimony, as in this instance, she always paused for a reply. Otherwise the current of her speech flowed uninterruptedly on.

'Yes,' she continued, 'your mother's one that knows when things is kept as they ought, and has a good eye for a saucepan. I like a lady that knows when you've had sand to it, and done your duty, for there's over many of them now-a-days as if you gives it a wipe round with a greasy cloth and sets it right way up on the shelf, they're never a bit wiser, it's all one. Miss Anne's a good one—addle me! I mean Mrs. Berrithorne—for liking every-



thing dainty sweet about her, and that's why I'm clean beat to know why she ever give in to Burstborough, and it the place it is; your muslin curtains a sight before you've had them up a week, and the windows that thick with dirt you can draw your finger across 'em the very day after they've been cleaned. But law! Miss Marjory, there's a many don't care a bit as long as they can have what they call their town comforts, which is gas and water laid on to every floor, and the shops so near you can whistle to 'em for what you want. That's what folks call town convenience. I'd a deal rather have a tallow dip and pump my own water from a spring, and have a loaf as I'd baked in the side oven myself, and feel that the air you'd got to breathe didn't make your very inside not fit to be seen.'

Mrs. Dumble paused when she had reach-



ed this depth of the depravity of cities, and commenced the process of wringing her counterpane, making it coil and wriggle like a huge white snake, inch by inch, up her brawny arm, whilst the untwisted tail of it splashed noisily in the wash-tub. Mrs. Dumble was very proud of her wringing, which she always did by hand, scorning intervention of machines, and specially proud of her wringing of counterpanes, which became perfect boa-constrictors under her deft management, with scarcely so much as a drop of water left in them when the last remnant of tail had been extricated from the tub. You might always tell a good washerwoman, Mrs. Dumble said, by the way she set about her wringing. There were them that stood, and twisted, and strained, and made such 'deed' as never was, and, after all, left your counterpane a sop. And



there were them that held it well under their arm, and let its head wind slowly up, with every drop of wet kept down in the tub, and when you had finished it right down to the tip of the tail, there was your snake as white as wool, and almost as dry, and nothing to do but give it a shake out and fling it over the line, and let any of your steam laundries beat it if they could.

Mrs. Dumble got it over the line, and then came back to the dark side of town life.

‘It’s a mystery and a marvel to me, it is, how folks ever brings themselves to sit down content that way, when there’s the country, fresh and clean, for them to be happy in. And dark; why, when I was at the Rev. Sparrington’s, the gas was never put out in the passages, ’cause why? Because the sunlight never had a chance



to get in. And your kitchen right down under ground, so as when you come to want to be buried you needn't go no lower. I said to the young woman as lived housemaid with me, we'd had a good taste of being buried alive, and wouldn't have stood it so long, if it hadn't been for the wage, which it stands to reason you ought to get handsome, when there's so much to put up with; and that's what your sister, bless her! is going to, and her that fresh and particlar as a white rose just unfolded out of its own leaves.'

The force of this contrast moved Mrs. Dumble deeply, and a tear fell into the wash-tub.

Or it might have been personal considerations. I am inclined to think it was personal considerations, for she went on to lament over the parlours, which would so soon be deserted.



‘And when I’d just bought fresh curtains to ’em, Miss Marjorie, with Mr. Berri-thorne not being agreeable to the previous pattern. He’s not a gentleman, isn’t Mr. Berrithorne, as thinks a deal in a general way about the furniture, as long as the meals is served reg’lar, but he said, being as they could be seen from the outside, he’d rather there was a change made. And a change there *was*; and seven shillings I paid for that pair of lace curtains, and them new put up not a couple of months ago, and a spotted pattern as I should never have chosen, if it had been myself to please, and now, you see, the rooms is to be vacant.’

Mrs. Dumble looked aggrieved, and proceeded.

‘But I was thinking, Miss Marjorie, I should step across to your Ma, and ask her would she speak a word for me to the



gentleman as comes after, for another, I suppose, you'll be like to have, and Mr. Haseltine not what he'd used to be in the way of moving about. Both Jonathan and me says your father isn't what he'd used to be, Miss Marjorie.'

What a dislike I had to anyone saying that. And more than ever, now that it was so true. But Mrs. Dumble talked on so cheerfully, and had so much personal experience to bring to bear upon that, as upon every subject. And she was not a woman who would let you stay her when she was once embarked upon conversation.

'It's what we've all got to come to, Miss Marjorie, not to be what we'd used to be. That's why I give up service and married Jonathan, because I couldn't take the work or leave it as was most convenient. Not but what it's been a deal harder, but



I've got it under my own hand, and if I choose to sit me down a bit after dinner and have a wink of sleep, there's nobody need have anything to say to it. And Jonathan, it don't make no odds to him as long as he's comfortable. He takes little Rose Edith and he outs with her among the poultry, and lets me get my sleep, and then off I sets again, and gets my kitchen cleaned, and him his tea ready, and then I'm ready to start with dinner for the room, same as I shouldn't have been fit to do only for the bit of sleep. And sleep I needed, Miss Marjorie, for he's been that bad with his rheumatics, has Jonathan, that rest day nor night he couldn't.'

'Then I think it was Jonathan who needed the sleep,' I remarked, turning to go away, for the shadow of the church tower had been lengthening over the



meadow whilst the good woman talked. 'My Aunt Sunshine says rheumatism is a bad pain.'

'Wait a bit, miss, while you know it yourself, and then say. If Miss Newcourt's got it, you're bound to have your own share by-and-by, for it's in the family. And tell your aunt there's nothing so good as salt and water, as hot as ever you can bear it.'

'And how much of it do you drink?' I asked, innocently, with a view to Aunt Sunshine's present and my own future benefit.

'Law ! Miss Marjorie,' and Mrs. Dumble gave her elbow such an expressive jerk, 'it isn't took that way. You might sup and sup at it while doomsday, and your rheumatics 'ud be just where they was before. It's a fermentation as you want to make, that's what it is, and then rub 'em well



down. Now listen and I'll tell you. I buys a good lump of salt, if it's rock salt and better, and throws it into boiling water and lets it melt, and then I takes his legs and I puts 'em in as hot as he can bear it, and keeps 'em there a good bit, and then out with 'em and rubs 'em well, and laps them up and puts them back into bed, and you wouldn't think what a difference Jonathan says he feels. It beats all the doctor's medicine ever was. Now you tell your aunt, Miss Marjorie, and see if it don't work a wonder for her.'

I said I would.

' And then next time I come down with the eggs, and that'll be next Monday, I'll speak to your Ma about recommending me to the new gentleman as comes, for if he didn't want the both parlours he could have the one, same as Mr. Berrithorne had used to have it, and his cooking attended



to, as I've never had a fault found with me about it, and all the garnishings and the sauce and that so as Burstborough itself couldn't better me. I know what cooks are, Miss Marjorie, there's them that's to be depended upon and them that isn't. I always say a good cook's like a good husband, they're very few and far between, and it's lucky you may think yourself if you light on one of 'em. And now I reckon I'll side up my washing and get Jonathan his supper.'



## CHAPTER III.

My father advertised at once for another curate, Mr. Berrithorne having expressed his wish to be at liberty as early as possible, though he could not, according to the terms of his engagement, leave Willoughby before the expiration of his three months' notice. I think much as my father felt the separation from Anne, he felt still more the disappointment of his hopes, both for her and for ourselves. And he felt, too, that Mr. Berrithorne's was now an unwilling service.

A second advertisement was sent to the



*Guardian*, an exact copy of that which, after due preliminary discussion, had been prematurely posted by Seline, scarcely six months before. My mother smiled as we folded this one up and put it in the envelope.

‘We need not stipulate now that he shall be a married man,’ she said.

My father made no reply. There was a far-off, regretful look in his face. What a difference the over-hasty posting of that previous letter had made to us. If Lady Matilda had not called and put us all into such a bustle. If Seline had not been so prompt in doing what she thought was her duty. If there had been time to re-write the advertisement, with my mother’s proposed addition, Mr. Berrithorne would never have replied to it, our little home circle might have been unbroken still, and my sister Anne a happier woman.



At least so it seemed. But one can only feel that these things do not go by chance, that however natural law may appear to deal with mistakes and accidents as though they were sins, a law higher still, even the law of love, which dwells at the heart of the universe, will work them sooner or later into the well-being of life ; mistake and accident alike to be suffered for, but alike doing their work in the perfecting of character, in the building up, steadily and surely, of that house not made with hands, whose foundations rest on this material present, but whose fair completion waits for the final restitution of all things. It was not by blind chance that Seline took that letter, or that Mr. Berrithorne came to us.

Anyway, the second advertisement was sent, and, very strangely, the first reply that came was from Mr. Carlton, the gen-



tleman who had written to my father before, and who would probably have come to us in May, had he not decided to accept that six months' engagement in an east-end parish.

That engagement was now at an end. He wished to return to country work, his health having broken down in London. He wrote to my father again, proposing to come to Willoughby in November, when his existing engagement would cease. My father gladly accepted the proposal, Mr. Carlton's former letters having much impressed him by their superiority and straightforwardness. The matter was quickly settled. Mr. Berrithorne was told that he would be at liberty by the middle of November. Mrs. Dumble made application for the 'new gentleman.' That also was settled. Mr. Carlton came to us for a few days, until his rooms at the cot-



tage were put in order. Then he took possession of them, and all things moved prosperously on, save that my sister Anne was no longer amongst us as heretofore.

Amongst the best blessings that have ever fallen into my life, I now reckon the coming amongst us of David Carlton. He was to my father and mother as a son, to myself as a brother. His very name bound him to us at first, and after that the perfect beauty, unselfishness and devotion of his character. He was nothing much of a preacher, very different in that respect from my eloquent brother-in-law. Indeed, Lady Matilda, who very soon wanted to exercise her re-organizing powers upon him, said that his sermons were more like a schoolboy's copy-book themes than anything else. She might have been right, looking at them from her own point of view. But this I know, that his daily



life, in and out amongst the poor people of Willoughby, was worth all the sermons that were ever spoken from a pulpit. He reminded me of St. Francis de Sales. He was so grave, so gentle, so courteous, so backward in speaking of himself, so ready to acknowledge and believe in the goodness of others, yet so penetrating in his judgment of character, so quick to separate the wheat from the chaff, those who talked religion from those who lived it.

Our Willoughby people soon found out the mingled goodness and severity of the new curate. The little children loved him. They would run after him in the road, and catch hold of his hand and look up into his face for the kindly smile which was never withheld. He was a tall man of very erect bearing, and for his dark hair, pale face, and very finely-moulded features, might have stepped down out of the frame



of one of those old Italian pictures that hang in the long gallery between the Pitti and Uffizi palaces of Florence. Of course being handsome, the people naturally began to wonder what would become of his affections, but that sort of gossip soon ceased. No one could mark David Carlton's deportment for a single day, and then dare to speak a light word to him. There was a look upon his face as of one whose life is lived with the divine. Tender, kindly, human he was, but he wanted nothing from any of us that he could not return to all. And learning this, both the men and women folk left him to abide within his own cloistered cell of perfect peace.

However, if I go on about Mr. Carlton, I shall never get back to those whose lives had to be lived amidst the clash and tumult of Burstborough.



It was towards the end of September that my sister Anne was married. By the middle of November Mr. Berrithorne had taken up the curacy of St. Aidan's, and was established in a convenient house at the fashionable end of the parish. A part of Anne's little property, which was under her own control, furnished it very prettily, and, so far as her own wishes went, the life they lived in it would have been simple enough.

Mr. Berrithorne soon accomplished his desire of becoming a popular preacher. St. Aidan's church was always crowded when he preached in it. He also began to be in request for meetings and platform work. He did not take a very active part in work amongst the poor of the parish. The junior curate was told off for that department. As Mr. Berrithorne represented, both to himself and others, it was so much



better for a man to keep to that sort of work in which his special abilities were most completely brought to the front. Now Mr. Stanisland, the junior curate, had a fine talent for reaching the lower class, and particularly by visiting from house to house amongst them, and by addressing them in mission-rooms and that sort of thing, and it seemed a pity that this peculiar gift should not have abundant room for manifestation. It was also a pity that his own, Mr. Berrithorne's, should not also be confined to its legitimate sphere, the pulpit, more especially as the offertories, when he preached, were so satisfactory.

This last argument told, I think, forcibly with the vicar, whose income was largely dependent upon offertories and pew rents. Poor Mr. Stanisland was, in the opinion of the congregation, a good visitor, but a



tedious preacher, and therefore the vicar of Aidan's, in his quest for a senior curate, had been specially desirous of pulpit talent. Having obtained it, he would be clearly to blame not to put it in its right place. Therefore Mr. Berrithorne did the public work and did little else, the very thing which he enjoyed.

I went to stay with Anne, to help them to settle in their new home ; and when they had been there about a couple of months, I went again, for Mr. Berrithorne wanted a few afternoon teas and receptions given, in return for the numerous dinner invitations which had poured in upon them ; and my sister, who did not care much for society, was glad of even the very moderate supplementary aid which I could give. I don't know how it was, but I had felt myself much more of a grown-up person of late. Anne's marriage had naturally



brought me more to the front; but that was not all. I seemed to have left behind me the uncomfortable shyness, as well as the happy buoyancy of my girl days. I no longer wondered or cared, to any serious extent, what people thought about me. I was the rector's daughter, and I had to appear in society. I must be pleasant and ladylike, cheerful, interesting if possible, but if not interesting, always ready to do my part in conversation. When that part was played I gladly went home again, how gladly no one knew but myself, for the whole thing was as a pantomime to me, and settled down to my housekeeping and my books. But nobody had it to say of Miss Haseltine now, that she was a stupid. I think I knew better what I could give in general society, how much it was and also how little. I was no longer anxious to appear other than



an ordinary well-bred woman, incapable still of appearing to advantage in brilliant colours, or of wearing flowers with grace and effect, but still quite up to the level of the general public, and upon occasion above it.

Mr. Forrester had done all this for me. I don't suppose he ever knew it, but there it was. I often wondered if I had as unconsciously done anything of proportionate value for him. I think we often bestow our most valuable gifts unknown to ourselves. This much I knew, that, come what might, I was now worth a thousand-fold more to myself, and worth perhaps a little more to others, than I could ever have been but for those few days with him. And now Seline was to spend her whole life with him. What would he do for her? What would be the influence of his character upon hers? Would they



ever reach and touch each other at all? Or would they be like oil and water, which you may shake together in a bottle as long as you like, but they will always draw themselves apart and keep so, when the shaking ceases?

How curiously people do meet and part in this world. How the very companionships which seem as if they would most minister to the growth of our souls, are withheld, and those given which seem useless. Knowing Seline as I did, there seemed to me little likelihood that her nature would ever lift itself up to the greatness of her husband's. So far as he truly loved her, he must descend to her own level for his content. If he continued true to his ideal, if he would stedfastly follow what had been revealed to him as the best and the noblest, then he must follow it alone. They were not even like husband and wife



who have noble aims, though not the same aims, who still strive after the upward growth of character, and look to one goal, though reaching it by different paths. For such, life still wins its perfection sooner or later. Their souls will meet and touch hereafter, if not here. But for those who strive, the one upward, the other downward, what meeting shall there ever be?

I felt that Michael Forrester *would* be true to himself. He would live his new life worthily, though its foundations were built upon a bitter mistake. For hers, who had planted them there, and had planted her own upon falsehood, only time could tell.



## CHAPTER IV.

By staying with my sister Anne that second time after they were settled in their new home, I got a better insight into Mr. Berri-thorne's character than I had ever had before. In a man's own house he naturally shows himself for what he is. Little disguises fall off, little weaknesses come to light. So do little beauties and tender-nesses, if they are there.

They were there in Mr. Berrithorne's case, though much overlaid by the vanity which was at that time the controlling element of his nature, and which his



position at St. Aidan's was calculated to bring into prominent relief. I was struck by his occasional thoughtfulness for Anne. He was evidently anxious to make up to her for what she had sacrificed in leaving Willoughby. She had a noble reticence on that subject, but I was not so silent. Where Anne had her father's reserve, I had my mother's outspokenness. I made no secret to Mr. Berrithorne of the great grief my sister had suffered. I thought it was just as well that he should know how her life had been torn up by the roots, in order that his own might be planted in a more congenial soil.

I do not think this idea would have been borne in upon him except by a strong pressure from without ; but when it had once gained admittance, he did, according to his lights, allow himself to be influenced by it. He would bring Anne little gifts



from time to time. He would press her to go with him to entertainments and amusements. He would choose stylish bonnets for her, send home pretty laces and ties which had taken his fancy in the milliners' shops, buy costly stationery with her monogram in purple upon it, or order dainty little ornaments for the drawing-room. If he was reaping his own harvest of popularity in the parish of St. Aidan's, Anne should not be without her handful of gleanings. And there was at times a touch of reverence for her, a very occasional, but while it lasted, genuine, flash of insight into the beauty of her character. This touch of reverence, this flash of insight kept up my hope for Rowland Berrithorne, my faith that one day, knowing her, he might come to know himself; and shaking off the weaknesses which cumbered him now, might rise to the stature of a man.



Still I could not help feeling more and more, now that I was in the house with him, the absence of what Aunt Sunshine called a lofty spiritual aim. What other people would say about him, what effect such and such a passage in his sermons would have, not upon the consciences of his hearers but for his own reputation as an orator, these questions were very prominent. Perhaps still more so were those which touched the quality of the congregation and the largeness of the offertory. Not that this last indicated vanity only. The curates' stipends, no less than that of the vicar, were considerably affected by large collections, and a man must have been more than human not to be pleased when the immediate effect of a good sermon made itself felt in his own purse. I will, however, do Mr. Berrithorne the justice to say that he was never a money-grub.



He might or he might not have had an eye to that old godmother's bequest when he turned his attention from Seline to my sister, but he never in his after career showed any covetousness other than that of other people's praise. As regards money matters, he was careless. He was just as pleased with a good collection when it was to go to the junior curate as when he himself got the benefit of it, and would always take more pains to preach a fine sermon for other people than for himself. I do like to be able to say that of him.

Mr. and Mrs. Berrithorne soon had a very good position in Burstborough. The parish was a fashionable one. Most of the great merchants, men with their five and ten and fifteen thousand a year, lived at that end of the town. The senior curate went to their dinners, and their wives came to his afternoon teas. It was those



afternoon teas which were a burden to my sister Anne. They must be equal to those which Seline was giving with such success in her own beautifully furnished drawing-room at the College house. I don't know how it was, but my brother-in-law never could bear to be outdone by Mrs. Forrester in anything appertaining to their social position. And as Seline was infinitely cleverer than my sister in that sort of thing, and had, besides, better means at her command, the contest was very unequal. It is generally the wife who spurs the husband on in such matters as these, but in Anne's case the spur was constantly being applied to herself, and I must own with very unsatisfactory effect. She would rather, any day, have spent six hours in going about amongst the poor people of the parish, than have put herself into her wedding-dress, adapted now to evening



wear, and gone out to dinner at one of the fashionable houses, or even had an afternoon tea in her own drawing-room. In fact she was never intended for a social success amongst newly rich people, and, much as her husband lamented this drawback in her character, he had to make the best of it. I believe in really superior society, had there been any such in St. Aidan's parish, she would have held her own quite as well as himself.

Seline was not fastidious in her social tastes. She enjoyed colour and style and luxury and a fine general effect, and she very soon got herself ranked as a star of the first magnitude in the Burstborough heavens. She was a clever little creature. There was something entirely of her own in everything that she did. Her costumes had a style which could never be reproduced, even by the best dressmakers. She



never put them on as they were sent home to her from the milliner. She used to alter and drape and arrange them with an instinct of what became her best, putting a knot of ribbons here, a cluster of flowers there, giving the drapery a touch and a pull and a turn which made it an entirely different thing. People tried to copy it, but their failure only made her own superiority the more apparent. Whatever she wore seemed as if it belonged to her and was a part of herself, not developed from a fashion book and paid for at so much a yard. When she first came to us and had to look each side of a sixpence before she spent it, her graceful little toilettes were our envy and admiration. A bit of brown cashmere, and a daffodil dashed upon it, and there she was, as fascinating as Worth himself could have made her. What then might she not achieve with the



splendid allowance of pin-money which the second-master of Burstborough Grammar-school would be able to allow her.

Then her receptions were perfect. She was far too wise to attempt dinner-parties, for they depend greatly for their success upon the head of the house, and Mr. Forrester cared as little for that sort of thing as my sister Anne; but her evenings were the most charming things possible. Her drawing-room was in itself a work of art. There was something about it which suited people's complexions and made them look their best. She knew how to gather the right sort of people together, and make them talk to each other when she had gathered them. She had such brilliant tact in introducing people. She would tell someone that someone else was very desirous of making his acquaintance: then she would tell the



someone else that the first someone was charmed at the prospect of meeting her ; and so the two people met, each prepared of course to be pleased with the other. They found out probably before long that there was nothing in it, but still the delusion lasted long enough to give a pleasant froth to the social champagne, and when it began to get flat, Seline was ready to bring it to the sparkling stage again by a judicious little filip of flattery, and another introduction. Indeed to see her moving through her crowded drawing-room, always with dashes of yellow or scarlet or orange on the now costly materials of her sweeping dresses, conquest in her bright eyes and smiles upon her lips, one might say that good management had done its best for her. The force of cleverness could no farther go.

Mr. Forrester seldom appeared upon



these occasions. Perhaps, as Mrs. Dumble remarked, he was of an over-quiet sort. Everyone said he had great influence in the school, and I think he lived his life there, rather than in society. They once asked me to spend a week with them, on two evenings of which there was to be an 'at-home,' but I could not bring myself to accept the invitation. I felt I should be out of place, like a bit of Indian colouring amongst European dyes, and so I staid at home. Still our intercourse was always friendly when we did meet. I made a point of calling when I went to stay with my sister, and I heard a great deal about them, for Mr. Berrithorne, who was quite taken into favour again now, spent much of his time at the College-house, being almost as popular in Mrs. Forrester's drawing-room as in the St. Aidan's pulpit. Many a quiet evening have Anne and I had together,



talking over the sweet old Willoughby life, whilst we waited for Rowland's return from one of those brilliant at-homes. I think we loved the quietness as much as he loved the brilliance. And Anne was the very last woman in the world to complain of being left alone. She was only too thankful to be left so when the alternative was one of Mrs. Forrester's entertainments. I do not know that she was wise in this, but neither do I know that had she done violence to her own tastes and meandered in velvet and satin amongst the fashionables of Burstborough, things would have come out differently in the end.

This was what life had shaped itself into for those most interested in the double wedding, six months after its merry chime of bells had ceased.



## CHAPTER V.

DURING that six months, we at Willoughby had lived a very quiet life. It was a life lived now under the shadow of my father's failing health, and our doubts, which kept gradually increasing, of my sister Anne's happiness.

Of course she and her husband came over to see us from time to time, and even more frequently as the months wore on ; for after Christmas my father was quite unable to drive over to Burstborough, so if Anne wanted to see him at all, she was obliged to come to us. I used to go over for her nearly every week, driving her



back myself in the little pony-carriage, if Mr. Berrithorne did not care to come. It was often the case that he did not care to come. I think we were rather slow for him. He was now so much of a star in Burstborough that his portraits were to be seen, whole rows of them, in the leading stationers' shops, three-and-sixpence each the cabinet size, and proportionately less for the smaller ones. Rowland made a very good photograph. He had a well-marked and expressive face, and he was beginning to wear his hair a little tossed and tumbled, after the fashion of those who can afford to be singular. This told exceedingly well in a picture. I had no need to be ashamed of my brother-in-law, even side by side with the actresses and royalties and statesmen who made such an effective combination in the Burstborough shops.



I could never detect, on the part of my sister, any pride in her husband's rapidly increasing popularity. Even when Bromelli, the fashionable photographer, wrote to request the favour of a sitting from Mr. Berrithorne, in order to complete his local series of men of mark, Anne received the intimation with perfect self-possession, never going into raptures over it, or letting it disturb the even tenor of her way. Nor did she, as many a more managing wife would have done, use her husband's pulpit reputation as a lever for raising herself into social importance. I think he would perhaps have appreciated her more had she condescended to do this.

How well I remember her spending a Sunday with us once, when she had been married more than a year. I had driven over to Burstborough on the Saturday to fetch her, and it had been arranged that he



should come on the Monday and take her back by the evening train. He had come accordingly, and we were all gathered round the drawing-room fire, the autumn afternoon having fallen chilly, and he was telling us about this photograph business, Bromelli's request having just been made.

‘Anne,’ he said, ‘if you had as much tact as that fascinating little Mrs. Forrester, you might very soon get yourself to the top of Burstborough society. With my reputation to back you, there would not be the least difficulty. It is a great matter when a woman knows how to make use of her advantages. And it helps her husband, too.’

Anne's colour rose a little, but she made no reply. For my own part, I thought she had already helped him quite sufficiently by her own good breeding, dignity,



and consistency, to say nothing of the god-mother's legacy, over the greater part of which he had entire control. And these qualities would have helped him still more if he had had good sense enough to avail himself of them.

We all remained silent. Mr. Berrithorne did not mean anything offensive. He never did. It was only his vanity, which was growing more rapidly than even his reputation. He was beneath it all a kind-hearted little man, and would not give pain to anyone if he knew it. The pity was that he never did know.

By way of changing the subject, I began to talk of the sermon which Mr. Carlton had preached the morning before. One is always safe in talking to a clergyman about sermons, and this one had specially interested both my sister and myself.

It was about the parable of the merchant-



man seeking goodly pearls. Lady Matilda might say if she liked that Mr. Carlton's sermons had no more in them than a school-boy's exercises. Perhaps if you wanted flash and oratory they had no more, but certainly he did reach down to the very foundation of your life sometimes, and showed you both the past and present with a strange vividness all the stranger for its absolute simplicity. You felt he was telling you what he had experienced for himself. He was giving you no dry bones from the text-books of a pass examination, but a page torn out of a living volume of fact, a page which set you face to face with God and your own heart. And this with no pomp of words, it was only the quietness of the still small voice.

That sermon was the first to which Anne and I had listened together in Willoughby church, since her marriage. And as we



sat there in the rectory pew, all round about us the sweet memorials of our childhood, and yet so great a gulf now between the 'present and the past, it was natural that many thoughts should come to us.

The merchantman seeking goodly pearls.

Mr. Carlton said that to every human soul there came, sooner or later, a crisis, when to obtain that which was of true lasting value, it had to cast away everything else, the whole of life as it were, and in securing the one treasure, find life eternal. Self-renunciation must ever stand between ourselves and the pearl of great price. Our own wills cast away, divine peace given; the world lost, heaven won. What we once counted of so great value put back into its own place, the soul's vision cleared to look forth into the gladness of eternal light.

Afterwards, when we were alone together,



Anne and I had had a long talk about this sermon.

Whilst we were at home as girls, Anne had rarely said anything to me which afforded any glimpse into her inner religious life, nor had I to her. Since we had been separated, however, much of this reserve had fallen away. I think perhaps it is easier for friends who are not in constant communication, to reveal themselves to each other. Anne and I were more intimate now than when the curtain of absence was never dropped between us. I think we spoke more freely knowing that that curtain would soon be dropped again; just as in a darkened room, a chance light coming for a minute or two, seems to show us so much more, and to show it more vividly, than the steady accustomed daylight, during which we take so little notice because we know it will last.



Anne spoke of the close bearing of this sermon upon her own life ; how she too, in finding and following what her conscience told her to be the right way, had had to give up so much, and how in the giving up, there had come to her so great a treasure, even the peace which no outward tumult could destroy. Her quiet life with us, the peaceful surroundings of her girlhood, freedom from care, and strife, and worry, all these once lay between her and the pearl of great price. She had had to put them away. She had sold all that she had, and now the guerdon was hers.

But she did not know, and I could not tell her, that to me also, the same command had been given, and by me the same renunciation made. And in some sort the same peace won.

The memory of this Sunday afternoon talk was in our hearts when I spoke to



Mr. Berrithorne about David Carlton's sermon. Anne recalled parts of it, and we told him all we could remember.

He leaned back in the easy-chair, which was always now left for him as in former times it used to be left for Seline, and smoothed the picturesque masses of hair from his forehead, and he replied with the ease and carelessness of a man who is thoroughly well-acquainted with such subjects, and can therefore discuss them without painful premeditation.

‘Yes. I daresay a man looking at the non-theological aspect of the parable might treat it in that way. I cannot say that such a view would satisfy me. But I have already approached it from all sides in one of my best sermons. In fact, I think I may say I have dealt with it exhaustively. You heard me preach that sermon, Anne, did you not? It was the



one I gave before the Bishop when we had the offertory for the new bells last spring. And by the way, Anne, the Bishop was in church yesterday morning, slipped in quietly, you know, just as he has a way of doing, without any ceremony. He came into the vestry and complimented me after the sermon—spoke quite nicely, in fact. Kind of him, wasn't it ?

Here Mr. Berrithorne looked to me for a reply, and I said it was indeed very kind.

‘Yes ; the Bishop knows a good sermon when he hears it, and he has several times taken pains to let me know that he appreciates one. There were several influential people in church yesterday morning. The Laceford Brackenburys of Poole Hall come over pretty often now. You know Lady Matilda Rakeridge goes and stays there. I have seen her in church with them. Between ourselves I don't think she cares



much for Mr. Carlton. He seems to be a quiet, ineffectual sort of man. No popular talent about him. But I daresay he is very acceptable amongst the poor.'

Nothing more was said about the pearl of great price, nor any self-renunciation which must be gone through in order to obtain it. An expression of sadness came over Anne's face, but she made no remark. She laid her hand over her eyes, and I might have thought she was asleep, but for the occasional movement of her lips. My father also made no effort to sustain the conversation, and I felt a strong visitation of silence myself. I am afraid Mr. Berrithorne would think we did not sufficiently sympathise with the honour put upon him by the presence of the Bishop in church.

I am afraid also he did not look upon our silence as any rebuke to the want of true



and lofty appreciation which his own remarks had implied, for he went talking on, addressing himself chiefly to me, for I was now the only one who appeared satisfactorily awake.

‘I should not wonder if the Laceford Brackenburys take sittings at St. Aidan’s. They say the rector of Poole is a terrible old duffer, but of course they are bound to attend their parish church as a regular thing. Mrs. Brackenbury is a clever woman, and enjoys a good sermon. I was really very pleased to see Lady Matilda with her. I rather fancy she had come over for the Sunday on purpose. You did not happen to notice if she was at your church in the morning.’

I was glad to be able to tell him that I had not noticed. If I could have summoned up courage enough, I would have told him that he ought to have been at



least as unobservant when he was engaged in delivering a message from above. Still Anne was there. It was better I should listen in silence.

‘ You see I am getting known out of the parish now. I don’t think I shall be content until I find myself vicar of a London church. The fact is, some of my congregation tell me I ought to be that now. Burstborough, you know, is all very well, but it is not a cultivated place, not a cultivated place by any means. For a clever man really to make his mark he ought to go up to town and keep himself well before the public. I am beginning to feel a provincial town rather slow. And as for Willoughby, I wonder how I ever managed to get through six months here.’

Mr. Berrithorne stretched himself and looked out of the window across the lawn where the red beech leaves were drifting.



Our old church tower rose grey and state-ly above its yew-trees ; the October sunlight touched into gold the lichens under its battlements and upon the dripstones of its belfry windows. Just then the ringers started their afternoon practice. Clearly the seven-voiced chime fell upon the still air. When it ceased for awhile, one could hear the sound of the flail in the big barn - just past Mrs. Dumble's cottage. Then a robin flew into the now almost leafless cherry-tree by the tennis-lawn. We could see its scarlet breastplate flitting hither and thither in the sun. Then it swelled its little throat and set up its warble, the herald of coming winter. That too we could hear clearly enough when the chimes left off. Then came just one stray butterfly, and the robin darted down upon it and carried it back into the leafless cherry-tree.



The leafless cherry-tree ; blossom, fruit, and foliage all gone now. And it did not seem so long since I had watched it in its bridal beauty on the lawn, with Rowland Berrithorne and Seline and my father and Anne playing tennis under it. And its wedding veil of blossom was so fair, embroidered by Nature's own sweet and cunning hand. This not a year and a half ago, and we had had to do since then with other wedding veils, other bridal finery. All that also was passed, and the leaves were falling, and if the robins still sang sweetly for us, it was only to tell of coming winter. And in the midst of their song they would swoop down upon the poor little white-winged butterfly and end its flight.

And still Mr. Berrithorne talked on.

‘ If the Laceford Brackenburys should take sittings at the church it will be a



tremendously good thing for us. You see people of that kind feel they must do something handsome, and it is an example to the rest. I mean to stir the vicar up to have a new organ and enlarge the choir. The musical part of the service is not equal to a congregation like ours. We ought to have an anthem every Sunday afternoon. Anything of that sort draws wonderfully. With an outlay say of fifty pounds a year we could do it, and now that I have got the congregation up so, we ought to have the service to correspond. The vicar told me himself, only last Sunday, that nobody had ever filled the church as I do now. Nice of him, wasn't it? Because you know a vicar doesn't often like to be bowled over by his curate in that way.'

I wondered if Mr. Berrithorne talked in this manner in general society, or whether



this revelation of himself was reserved for the family upon which he had conferred such honour by matrimonial alliance with its eldest daughter. I think, however, it could only have been to ourselves that my good little brother-in-law laid open his inmost thoughts and feelings, or surely some of the wiser members of St. Aidan's would have given him what he so much needed, a good shaking. Whereas, instead of a shaking, they only gave him more and more appreciation, and, by-and-by, this appreciation took a substantial form, namely, the addition of a hundred a year to his stipend. The vicar was already paying as much as he could afford to his two curates, and, as Mr. Berrithorne filled the church to overflowing, and had his portrait in all the leading stationers' windows, and might therefore reasonably expect a speedy invitation to a London pulpit,



such a disaster as his removal was for the present stopped by this honorarium, raised amongst the more wealthy and fashionable pewholders, who liked to feel that they had the most popular man in Burstborough as their curate.

Upon the strength of this hundred a year extra, Mr. Berrithorne moved to a larger house, and considerably altered his style of living. The new home was very near the college grounds, and my brother-in-law's visits to Mrs. Forrester became more frequent. I rarely heard of Seline and her husband, except through Anne. I only knew that she was as popular in her way as the St. Aidan's curate in his; that whatever she took up she carried through with brilliant success; that her dinner-parties—for she had begun to give them now—were the best in Burstborough; that if people wanted to get up a concert



for a charity, they had only to ask Mrs. Forrester to smile upon it, and straightway the tickets sold like magic; and that, to get admission to her 'at-homes' went for almost as much, in a small way, as being presented at Court.

One heard less and less about Mr. Forrester, except in connection with the college itself, where he was becoming the master-spirit. And he was very active in all schemes connected with the welfare of the poor. I believe the foundation of much that has since been done for Burstborough in relief associations and provident societies, was laid by Michael Forrester in hours of tough, hard work, whilst his wife was scattering smiles at concerts and evening entertainments. These schemes never found their way into the newspapers, still less were they talked of in general society; but they are now bearing fruit in



a system which, in those districts where it is carried out, has reduced pauperism to almost a minimum.

As Seline soon found that her husband was very little use, except for financial purposes, and as it was necessary for some one to be in attendance to fetch and carry and be generally ordered about on social occasions, Mr. Berrithorne gladly took that position, and was nearly always to be found wherever Mrs. Forrester was in the ascendant. It was now quite the thing for all the fashionable people to ask him to their entertainments, and he went the more readily because he said it bound them to the church. He reaped his reward in constantly-increasing popularity, to say nothing of the splendid offerings of game, fruit, and other luxuries which came to him from the houses of the wealthy. Nay, I even think they would have given



him costlier gifts than these, for he told Seline—and in that way it came round to us, Seline never being the one to keep a secret—that he could easily have married three thousand a year, if he had only been wise enough to wait a little longer.

When I heard that, how I did wish that for Anne's sake he *had* waited.



## CHAPTER VI.

DURING the year following that October, I went very little to Burstborough, for my father's health was now a constant source of anxiety to us. He made no complaint, but month by month he grew feebler, until even the walk across the meadows to Aunt Sunshine's cottage was too much for him. Still there was no disease, only weakness. The Burstborough physician told us that. And watching over him, caring for him as best we could, we had to leave the rest.

I think his disappointment about my



sister's marriage took a very deep hold upon him. They had been so entirely one in aim and sympathy and pursuits. His life was bound up in her. He knew that devotion to himself, the hope that she could be still more to him and for him, had influenced her in her engagement to Mr. Berrithorne. She had persuaded herself that a son would be gained, not a daughter lost, by her marriage. And my father, taking for granted perhaps more attachment on her part than she really felt, had accepted the marriage as one which would promote the happiness of both and keep her still amongst us. Mr. Berrithorne's sudden change of plans so soon afterwards broke up at the same time that assurance and the foundations of our trust in his honour. And the gradual development of his character only made more manifest what we then



suspected. It was this piercing of his hand by the reed which should have been its support that was telling now so heavily upon my father; this, and no disease which medicine or tending of ours could touch.

I do not know what we should have done in those months but for David Carlton. The work that man accomplished, and without ever making any fuss over it, was almost incredible. My father spoke of having a second curate, but Mr. Carlton would not hear of it. He said he was quite able to work the parish alone, and he did work it alone; for within fifteen months of his coming to us my father had to give up preaching. Then he had to give up going amongst the people. Then he took his last walk in the churchyard. Then even to saunter up and down the lawn became too wearisome an effort for



him, and the great easy-chair was brought downstairs, and little by little the papers and account-books which suggested hard work were put away, and we had to face the truth that the final stage of the journey of his quiet life had begun. It was but waiting a little while more or less, and Death, who was also waiting patiently outside, would cross our threshold, going out again not alone.

Through all these months David Carlton took from us whatever care and anxiety the watchful reverence of a son could bear away. And he did the whole of the church work and the parish visiting. Yet he never seemed in a hurry. He had always time to stop and speak to the old women who wanted to tell him of their troubles; time to say a kind word to the schoolboys and ask them about cricket or football; time to pick up the little children and give them



a splendid toss and a tumble, and set them on their feet again looking as proud as though the Queen herself had smiled upon them ; time to go out of his way to carry a basket for a worn-out woman, or a baby for some poor little tired sister whose arms ached with her long morning's work. And then, with no bustling to make up for lost moments, he went quietly on his way, never hasting, never resting.

Lady Matilda nagged at him of course, accused him of Romanising tendencies because he wore a white stole at baptisms ; called upon us to have an understanding about the invocation which he used before the sermon, instead of the collect to which we had been accustomed ; had a great deal to say about forsaking the old paths when a processional hymn was introduced, and called herself upon Mrs. Dumble to know if it was true that the new curate



never ate meat upon a Friday, because, if it was, she should feel it her duty to write to the Bishop. Such popish customs should not be introduced into the parish without a protest from those who valued the simplicity of the faith. And she told my father that if any further alterations were made she should drive over on Sunday mornings to Burstborough, and attend St. Aidan's, as Mrs. Laceford Brackenbury said Mr. Berrithorne was a very superior preacher since his removal to a town pulpit.

Mr. Carlton took no notice. She might as well have nagged at one of the elm trees on the village green. He listened calmly and went on his way, and there was an end of it. I don't think anything ever troubled him, so long as he knew he was doing his duty. And when Lady Matilda found that he could not be made



uncomfortable, she gave over. The Bishop was never written to that I know of, and if she occasionally went to St. Aidan's, why the pleasure to Mr. Berrithorne was far greater than the privation to us.

Mrs. Dumble did not find her new lodger quite so satisfactory as the old one, though she carefully guarded her expressions of disappointment by an ample testimony to his general good qualities.

'As gracious spoken a gentleman, Miss Marjorie, as you'll find anywhere, and a pattern for punctuality. But a woman like myself is thrown away upon him, and that's just what she is, so now you know. If it's a hot roast on a Sunday, why then it's a cold roast every blessed day of the week, until you come to the bare bones, never anything more than that, and doesn't even seem to care for a sup of gravy to it; and as for putting it into rissoles with



garnishings and a thickened sauce, or doing it up in a fricassee, or maybe grilled with vegetable trimmings, why he looks at you as if he'd never heard of anything of the kind. And as for even a suggeshun of a fancy pudding, well you needn't think of it, and that's why I say that I'm thrown away upon him. I've seen a deal of clerigical society,' continued Mrs. Dumble, 'for before I come to your mother I was five year with the Rev. Sparrington at Burstborough. And when I was Mrs. Poslip and let apartments, being left a widow unprovided for, I was always partial to a curate because of they're being as you may say respectable, and respectable they *were*, Miss Marjorie, but always to say very particular about their meals, a deal more so than a young man in an office or that. And better they should be, for I was the right one to give them satisfaction. But



law ! Miss Marjorie, talk of giving satisfaction to Mr. Carlton, why he'd be satisfied with dry bread and a spoonful of broth, so you give him it on a clean plate. I never *did* ; no, nor I never shall.'

How well I could believe it all, but I let Mrs. Dumble talk on.

'I reckon her ladyship got word of his not feeding hisself sufficiently, for she come down here and asked a deal of questions. It wasn't the feeding she started with, but to ask for the benefit of a seat of eggs, as she knows my black Spanish can't be beat for looking handsome on a table. And then she got on to whether he thought a deal about his eating, and to make her better satisfied I started with the Sunday, and told her every day of the week, and how when we got as far as Friday there wasn't a deal left; but Mr. Carlton he don't matter that a bit and says he'll go without,



and go without he does. Her ladyship seemed to think a deal of it and said it wasn't a thing as ought to be allowed, and something about the Bishop ; but I said I could tell her a deal more than the cold meat, if *that* was all, for once I made him a Solomon-gundy with the very best of everything put into it, and you know what a Solomon-gundy is, Miss Marjorie, and the time it takes if you do your duty to it, only as he gives so little trouble in a general way, I thought for once I'd try and waken him up to enjoy his vittles like a man. And if you'll me believe, when I'd got it set on the table, and proud I was of it, he just turned him round on his chair and asked me was it a cottage pie ? Yes, and didn't seem to pay no more respect to it than if it had. Just think of that, Miss Marjorie. And then had a plate of it sent to Ebenezer Crump, him as lies



in bed with the paralytics, and doesn't know chalk from cheese. I didn't ever make him a Solomon-gundy again, nor doesn't mean to, and her ladyship didn't ask no more questions, only said she should ask him up to the Hall and talk to him about it, as I'm sure some one has a need to. But he haven't been the least different since, just takes it or leaves it, and never says a word. Else, Miss Marjorie, he's as gracious a gentleman as I could wish to have in the rooms, that is he.'

How I laughed to myself at the thought of Lady Matilda driving all the way down from the Hall to find out whether Mr. Carlton fasted on a Friday, and then getting the story of the Solomon-gundy instead. And I knew so well that Mrs. Dumble would not let her depart thence until she had heard the uttermost syllable. She deserved it, even if her coachman and



her footman and her horses—though I pitied them—and her carriage and all the rest of her things were the worse of standing outside in the rain all that time. For it *was* a wet day, as Mrs. Dumble went on to tell me.

‘A very downpour, Miss Marjorie, and kind it was of her ladyship to come out in it to make enquiries. It was the enquiries as brought her, not the eggs as she put the visit upon, *that* I’m certain sure of, though why, if a gentleman likes his meat cold instead of a rissole or a croquett with garnishings, the Bishop should be let know of it, is more than I can tell. When I was living cook with the Rev. Sparrington, he’d used to preach a deal about us not making a god of our bellies, if you’ll excuse me, Miss Marjorie, but them was the very words he said, and should be simple in our eatings and drinkings, and that at



evening church of a Sunday, when I'd been agate all the morning over a boned turkey, or standing at the fire with a jelly, as there never was a man like the Rev. Sparrington for being particular about his jellies. Savoury they were, for the most part, Miss Marjorie, with very often fish or game let in, and fancy shapes cut out in carrot or beet to give a colour, and if it took you a minute it took you three hours to make that jelly what it ought to be, and lovely it was, a very picture to look at, when I turned it out and laid the vallegated brocoli round about it for a garnish. But to preach about not thinking a deal of our eatings and drinkings wasn't to my thinking what it ought to have been, and if a Bishop has to be let know at all about what gentlemen eats, he'd better get word of them as keeps their cooks from morning church over savouries,



and not meddle with such as Mr. Carlton, as takes his hot roast of a Sunday and sticks to it all the week, while if it's down to the bones on a Friday he goes without. That's what I think, Miss Marjorie, but I'm nobbut an unlarned woman.'

Mrs. Dumble had got to the root of the matter for all that, though I did not tell her so.



## CHAPTER VII.

AND still we lived our quiet life, my mother seldom going out now beyond the rectory garden. The morning room, into which the great easy chair had been brought, the room where the early sun shone in so brightly, and whose window looked out towards the church, was now the heart and centre of our home, for there my father lay, waiting calmly and tranquilly, and we knew there was but one end to that waiting.

David Carlton became to us like one of ourselves. Indeed, it seemed to me that



had my little brother, dead now so many years, been spared to grow up amongst us, we could scarcely have cared for him more than we did for this stranger. Curiously enough we found, by chance, that he was the same age as our little Davie. His birthday was on the same day of the same year. Such as my brother would have been, such was David Carlton now.

And truly we needed all that he could do for us. Drop by drop my father's life ebbed away. His countenance, always so refined in its spiritual beauty, became still more and more beautiful, but my mother and I felt, as we looked upon it, that the pure soul shining through would soon pierce its thin veil and be at home with God.

And so it was. For at Eastertide, when the primroses were at their brightest, and my old font cover had put on its broidery



of ivy stems, room was made for another by little Davie's side in the churchyard, and our home was left unto us desolate.

Yet scarcely desolate, so closely did the unseen presence of him who had once been its visible blessing still overshadow and protect us. No death can separate those who love each other. The dropping of this fleshly encasement is but an incident in the soul's life, fateful indeed and sad for us who are left behind, and who only by such encasement can have our loved ones manifested to us; but for the soul itself, no dismissal to a far distance, only leave to be nearer and ever nearer those whose life will one day be as its own. He was not very far from us, though our eyes were holden that we could not see him.

My mother and I had to break up our home at the rectory. After an interval



of a few months, Lord Avonbridge, the patron, gave the living of Willoughby to Mr. Carlton. A better man could not have had it. We felt that the rectory would hardly cease to be home to us while he lived there.

He would have had us still retain it as our home. He tried to persuade my mother to remain in it for her lifetime. He said, if Aunt Sunshine would come and live with us, he would occupy her house. It was large enough for him, and always would be, as he never meant to alter his manner of life. But my mother was very proud, and not even from one whom she loved so tenderly as David Carlton would she receive the favour of living in a home which was not hers by right. Besides, I think there was also a very noble unselfishness about her. The sorrow of quitting the old roof-tree must



sooner or later come, and she would not let me face it alone. We would go forth to our new home whilst yet we could dwell in it together.

So it was arranged that we should share Aunt Sunshine's cottage. It was family property, having been built by my grandfather as a provision for his daughters whenever Newcourt should have to be given up. It could easily be enlarged so as to meet the requirements of our united housekeeping. My mother and Aunt Sunshine talked the matter over between themselves. Two new rooms were built in place of some farm premises which adjoined the house. Mr. Carlton had no wish to hurry us out of the rectory. We stayed there until the alterations were quite completed, which time was the Christmas following the Easter of my father's death. We kept our Christ-



mas in the old home, and our New Year in the new one, and with Aunt Sunshine always near us and the old familiar rectory furniture round about us, we did not feel that we were strangers in a strange land.

Anne and her baby daughter, now six months old, came to spend their Christmas with us. Rowland was to spend his with the Forresters. This was now the fourth Christmas of their married life. Hitherto they had always come to the rectory, driving over after the morning service at St. Aidan's. This time Mr. Berrithorne felt he should like a change, and we did not press the matter. It could be no day of feasting to any of us. Indeed it rather seemed as if we owed him an apology for asking that he should come and eat his Christmas dinner with four quiet women like ourselves, when he had the choice of all the fashionable end of Burstborough,



which was only too proud to get him to say grace over its turkey and plum-pudding.

It was at this time, Anne having been married a little over three years, that I began to notice the lines of care upon her face. A wistful, far-away look in her eyes I had often seen. That always comes to the thoughtful, even when life gives them of its best. But now there was anxiety and a certain cramp of bitterness from time to time. That should not have been, especially now that the little Phyllis, named after our mother, had come.

It was beautiful to see Anne with her baby-girl. All that she could not give to her husband, for he was not a man who cared for caresses, found its outlet now in the tenderness which a little child never refuses. Anne was without doubt much happier. Her life was now in some sort



fulfilled. And yet that unconscious story of unrest came out from time to time, in letters to be understood of us all, upon her face.

My sister was not one to say much about her own affairs. She did tell me, however, what accounted in some measure for the anxiety. The larger house into which they had moved when her husband's stipend was increased, had been the pretext for much more display in their style of living. The furniture which was bought when they first moved to Burstborough, had all been sent away by Mr. Berrithorne, as old-fashioned and quite unsuitable to their present position. He did not mean to be content, he said, until his wife could receive her guests in a drawing-room at least equal to Mrs. Forrester's. That ambition had at last been achieved. Even Seline herself admitted that the ebonised



chairs, and tables, and cabinets, and mirrors, and brackets, and the heavy brocaded curtains and Queen Anne ornaments, were superior to her own, and that if Anne could only dispose them to the best effect, and then dress herself to match, and flit about amongst the company with a little more pride and animation, her afternoon teas might pass off tolerably well. This Seline frankly owned to Mr. Berrithorne, and Mr. Berrithorne gave his wife the benefit of the information.

But this ebonised furniture and these heavy curtains and Queen Anne ornaments were none of them paid for, and that was what weighed upon my sister's mind. The first house had been furnished with part of the old godmother's legacy, and the upholsterer, one of the most expensive Burstborough tradesmen, had said he would exchange the things at very trifling addi-



tional cost. But somehow, when the larger rooms came to be taken into account, and the superior paper-hangings, and the artistic manner in which the ceilings and doors were decorated, the upholsterer thought it was a pity not to have the furniture in accordance, and Mr. Berri-thorne thought so too. And the aforesaid ebonised suite was chosen, with all the other things, regardless of expense, the upholsterer promising, with the suavity of his trade, that no trouble about payment should arise. He should be only too glad to wait. If Mr. Berrithorne chose, he could send in a small cheque from time to time, just as he found it convenient ; but if not, it was of no consequence, no consequence at all.

A year had elapsed now, and not one 'small cheque' had ever been sent in. Not that Mr. Gobridge, the upholsterer,



had ever asked for such a thing, nor had the painters and paperers and plasterers, who were all still unpaid; but my sister, who was proud and sensitive in such matters, could not bear the humiliation of living in debt. Mr. Berrithorne kept saying it would be all right, there was no need to worry. Next quarter his stipend would leave ample margin for sending in a cheque; but next quarter came and no cheque was forthcoming. There were the expenses of summer holidays; there were the expenses of carriages, for a gentleman could not be expected to walk to and from such entertainments as the fashionables of Burstborough gave; there was also dress, for the senior curate of St. Aidan's must be a credit to his profession. People did not like to see their clergyman enter their drawing-rooms looking as if his things had come out of a second-hand shop. The



cheque must be sent next quarter, and Mr. Gobridge—for the upholsterer now began to send in gentle reminders—should be told in the meantime that a percentage should be added from time to time upon the original value, by way of making matters straight.

This sort of thing had been going on for a year and a half, and there seemed no immediate prospect of putting an end to it. Anne herself took good care to keep the household expenses down. She spent nothing over amusements, scarcely anything over dress. She had never taken a regular holiday since she was married. One or another of the wealthier families of St. Aidan's would ask Mr. Berrithorne to go for a trip to the seaside, and once he was taken for a month to Paris free of all expense. But Anne had a certain pride about her which kept her from accepting invitations like these. What she could



not pay for or return in its own kind, she would not accept at all. I think she was quite right. I have seldom found rich people magnanimous enough to feel that what they give to those who are inferior to themselves in no other matter than money, does not place the inferiors under an obligation. They may disclaim such a feeling, but it is there nevertheless, and those who accept the gift bind themselves to acknowledge the obligation. A rich man or a rich woman who can give and not only not ask but not even expect anything in return, must combine elements of character which involve true greatness. Such elements of character I think my sister did not find in those, her husband's monied friends, who carried him off gratuitously to Paris or the seaside, and therefore she preferred declining both the amusement and the tax, to her independ-



ent spirit a very heavy one, which those who provided such a generous treat would unhesitatingly have exacted.

All this I gathered, little by little, during that last Christmas Day which Anne spent with us, just before we left the old rectory. I never wondered again at the lines of care and sometimes of bitterness upon her face, but I wished more and more that we could have been left to ourselves, as in the long ago times, and that no other visitor than Death had crossed our threshold. Death, who, in taking joy often gives peace, whereas that visitant who, in the golden guise of Love, opened our doors, had brought us only disappointment and fears which cast their long shadows far into the coming years.



## CHAPTER VIII.

MR. BERRITHORNE came next day to take my sister and the little Phyllis home. He did not seem to be at all under the pressure of anxiety, or anything else except the natural desire of a man who is already popular to keep up that popularity and, if possible, increase it. I think it is the punishment of success that no one is ever satisfied with it. It takes almost as much as it gives, in its restless craving after something more.

He had a great piece of news to tell us. At least from his point of view it



was great. We had known for some time that there was to be a bazaar in aid of the funds for the new organ at St. Aidan's. Mrs. Forrester, who went to that church now, had taken it up very much, and whatever she took up was sure to be successful. The fashion had just then come in of adding scenic effect to these displays of fashion and fancy-work, by having the things spread out in mimic Alpine villages or old English streets, and having the stall-holders dressed in costumes to correspond. Something of this kind was talked of for the St. Aidan's organ bazaar, and great was the tribulation which my sister Anne had gone through in the shape of committees, at which various schemes were discussed, quarrelled over and flung aside, none of the ladies being able to agree as to what would be best. One wanted the thing to be marine, a sort of



reproduction of the quarter-deck of a ship; another wanted Japanese costumes; another an English street; another a Swiss village; another an Italian market-place, and so on, until Anne began to hope, and for her sake I did the same, that the time-honoured catastrophe of the Kilkenny cats would put an end both to the bazaar and the troubles connected with it.

But Mr. Berrithorne brought us word that Mrs. Forrester had struck out a brilliant idea whilst they had been cracking their walnuts over the fire on the previous evening. Nothing so common as Alpine villages or old English streets. They would have a bit out of the 'Arabian Nights Entertainments.' The Burstborough Town Hall, at which the bazaar was to be held, was to be converted into an Oriental city. There was to be a mosque at one end, a Hindoo temple, with a pee-



pul tree and a fountain at the other. There were to be tableaux of scenes from Eastern poetry; the ladies were to be in Indian and Mussulman costume. There was to be a huge elephant, with crimson trappings and gilded tusks, and a palm-tree and a fountain, and a Hindoo wedding procession, and juggling and serpent-charming, and I know not what.

Mr. Berrithorne could talk of nothing else, though it was our last Christmas in the old home, and so many and great changes were before us. It really was a brilliant idea, and we let him have the satisfaction of fully explaining it. A committee was to be called the very next week, and if the resolution for the Indian scheme was not carried, he and Mrs. Forrester were going to take the whole affair into their own hands, and Mr. Gobridge, the upholsterer, was to put up the mosque



and the temple and the elephant and the rest of the properties. Whatever the expense might be, Seline was sure the novelty of the whole thing would be so startling that the Burstborough public would crowd to the bazaar, and the proceeds would be ample to build the organ and meet all liabilities.

Anne went home. Then came our removal to Aunt Sunshine's, and for awhile we saw but little of each other. When we were quite settled in the cottage—which was not until the end of February—I went to stay for a while with my sister.

It was my first long visit to her, though she had been married over three years. My father's failing health had kept me at home very much. I knew the time must be short, and I longed to spend every moment of it with him. After his



death, it seemed still less possible for me to go away for any lengthened time. Even when we were together, my mother and I, the old rectory home, once so full of life, was sadly too large for us, and to leave her alone in it was not possible. Now things were different. She and Aunt Sunshine were very comfortable in the cottage. I could well be spared for a time, and it seemed as if Anne needed companionship more than the rest of us, even in her busy married life. So I went to her for a month.

I think if Rowland Berrithorne, in the full tide of his success, had a regret at all, it still was that he had not waited a little longer and then married some one who, in addition to the possible three or four thousand a year, might also have possessed the qualities of ambition and enterprise which would have helped him to the top of the



ladder. Anne, as he hinted to me more than once, was very good in her way, but it was not exactly the way which suited a man of his abilities. What he could not find in his own wife, however, providence or something not so benignant found for him in the wife of Mr. Forrester.

Seline was one who must have excitement, just as Mr. Berrithorne must have popularity. She must keep herself before the public in her social capacity, as he in his ministerial position. I often thought those two had missed their way very much by not uniting their talents in a permanent relationship; for the results produced by such mutual aid could not have been other than brilliant. What was within their power, nevertheless, they determined to achieve.

Of course nothing was talked of now but this grand Oriental bazaar for the St.



Aidan's organ fund, which was to take place at Whitsuntide. It was now for the first time that I had a glimpse into the home life of Seline and her husband. She was constantly at my sister's house, not for anything my sister could be to her, but on business connected with the bazaar, 'dear old Anne,' as she always called Mrs. Berrithorne, being neither more nor less than a born idiot where anything of public enterprise was concerned.

When the general outline of the proceedings had been sketched out, there were still the details to consider. As is generally the case, these expanded very much. Both Mrs. Forrester and my brother-in-law thought it was a pity to stop short of anything which would give the undertaking a stamp of originality. The committee had sanctioned the mosque and



the Hindoo temple and the elephant and the fountain under the peepul-tree. They were now to be asked to sanction an imitation of Akbar's Hall of Audience at Agra, a magnificent octagonal chamber, supported upon low columns. On a throne in the centre of this chamber, Akbar the Magnificent, to be represented—save the mark—by Rowland himself in full Oriental costume, was to dispense justice, namely, little sealed packets containing the future destinies of those who bought them at sixpence or a shilling each. The committee were also to be asked to sanction a triumphal car, in which was to be represented, every afternoon during the bazaar, the progress of Rama and Sita, this car to be drawn round the hall by choir-boys dressed for the occasion in suitable Hindoo style. Mr. Berrithorne was to be Rama, a slight



change in Akbar's costume being conceded to modern ignorance, and Mrs. Forrester was to personate Sita.

It was a very great piece of business. There was no end of private rehearsing to be done. Seline made a most effective Hindoo girl in draperies of scarlet and yellow, her black hair, which was long now, floating down her back, gold and silver ornaments covering her forehead, a nose-ring fastened upon her pretty little nose, earrings in her ears, and bangles on her bare arms from the shoulders down to the elbows. Mr. Berrithorne, too, was put into his Akbar clothes, and it seemed to me that they became him as well as the more priestly garments in which I had been accustomed to see him. Indeed, as an eastern potentate dispensing justice in his audience chamber, he bade fair to be as successful as the popular curate in St.



Aidan's pulpit, and would draw profits as satisfactory. It was a curious way, I could not help thinking, of being set apart to the work and office of the ministry ; but then, like my sister, I had been brought up in a quiet country rectory, and I did not know how religion was supposed to manifest itself in an important place like Burstborough.

Seline enjoyed the preparations thoroughly. She must be foremost in something, with somebody, and the bazaar was a splendid opportunity. It was better even than the fancy-ball in which, as Zuleika, she made such a sensation the Christmas after her marriage. For then she could only move gracefully through a few dances, and drape her spangled muslin with coquetish effect as she paced amongst evergreens and coloured lamps in the corridors ; whereas she would now be for four whole days



the observed of all observers, first in her crimson velvet howdah on the top of Mr. Gobridge's elephant, where she was to manage a post-office; and then as Sita with little boys waving peacock fans over her head in the triumphal progress, to say nothing of appearing in any variety of costumes in any number of tableaux during the intervals of active service. No wonder that our bright little Indian humming-bird flashed and sparkled and fluttered and darted, and could very well dispense with anything but financial aid from that grave college master of hers, who showed no inclination to interfere with her amusements or to share her triumphs.

People said he was one of the best masters the college had ever had. Its numbers were increasing rapidly every term. They said also that if he would take orders he would certainly succeed to



the head-mastership when Dr. Hatherley resigned, which rumour said he meant to do by-and-by, having come into possession of an estate down in the south. And if he became head-master and went on as he had begun, then a bishopric would only be a question of a few years more or less. Prime ministers liked to choose their bishops from amongst the successful head-masters of public schools, and wisely too, the men they had to deal with being but scholars of a larger growth.

But Seline a bishop's wife. The idea was too far-fetched. Looked at from that point of view, I think she would stand in her husband's way almost as much, though with a difference, as my quiet sister obstructed the triumphal progress of the popular curate.

Mr. Forrester did not seem at all to object to the intimacy between his wife



and Mr. Berrithorne. And to do Rowland justice, he was not the sort to make himself mischievous amongst women. There was no taint of evil in him, in that direction. If one could have soaked and drained the vanity out of him, as one does the sand out of a sponge, he would have made a useful member of society. His misfortune was that he had been thrust upon the public, or had thrust himself upon it, too early, before there had been a sufficient foundation of solid character laid to support such a top-heavy superstructure. Some day, unless this superstructure were taken carefully down stone by stone, it would topple over with a crash; but even in that case there would be no foulness revealed within, only emptiness. There was no vice about Rowland Berrithorne, else he could not have won, and in any sort continued to wear, the love of a woman like my sister Anne.



But how she bore with him in such silent fortitude, how she forgave the conceit which, ignoring her own steadfastness, actually thought it had done itself an injustice by not marrying qualities more worthy of it, only the God who creates such women and who waits and has long patience with such men, knows.



## CHAPTER IX.

As I said before, this Oriental entertainment kept swelling into wider and wider proportions. The committee made a stand at last. They declared they would not go to any further expense. Mr. Gobridge's elephant, with the howdah on the top for a post-office, had only got through with great opposition; but the triumphal car, and the peacocks' feathers, and the dresses for the little boys to draw it, they flatly refused. The expenses would eat up all the profits. The public would have novelty enough in what was already provided. The



committee did not deny that the idea of Rama and Sita was both splendid and original, but at the same time it was very costly. They had gone to the utmost limits of prudence with Mr. Gobridge, and if Mr. Berrithorne wanted to go any farther, he must go on his own responsibility.

Mr. Berrithorne then said that he *would* go on his own responsibility, so the triumphal car and all connected with it became a private undertaking, like the ebonised furniture, and the Queen Anne ornaments, and the massy curtains, and the rest of the drawing-room appurtenances. Seline had set her mind upon the car, and the car she meant to have, else she threatened to withdraw from the bazaar altogether. And of course, if she withdrew, the thing would fall to the ground.

There were evil-disposed people in the St. Aidan's congregation, as I suppose there



are in most, people who put a base construction upon innocent though foolish things, and who judge frivolity as though it were sin. Of this sort, I imagine, must have been the Laceford Brackenburys of Poole Hall, the family whose appearance at the church had been a cause of so great satisfaction to Mr. Berrithorne. They had looked coldly upon this bazaar business from the very first, and with special coldness upon the part which Mrs. Forrester and my brother-in-law took in it. But no active antagonism had been shown. Indeed, all that they did was to decline to contribute. They promised both to attend and to purchase.

It must have been from the Poole Hall people that Lady Matilda, who often went to stay there, picked up certain items of information which she did not fail to work up into a very cloudy looking whole. I



had not been many days at home from that long visit to my sister, when her ladyship did us the kindness to call upon us at the cottage; and as it so chanced, I was alone, my mother and Aunt Sunshine having driven over to Stilbury for the day.

Now, though we could no longer be nagged at in respect of Willoughby parish, except through our deep reverence for David Carlton, still nagging enough could be brought to bear upon us in connection with St. Aidan's, my sister being the wife of the senior curate there. Indeed, I think Lady Matilda held us responsible for everything that was done in that unfortunate church, and expatiated upon its various shortcomings, dust amongst them, just as if we had been the Jonathan and Mrs. Dumble of the sacred edifice. Were we never to have any relief from



the perpetual leaking of that tap of censoriousness ?

‘This bazaar seems to be bringing your brother-in-law into very close intimacy with Mrs. Forrester,’ she began. ‘I think it is rather a pity. You see, people are always so ready to make remarks on anything of that sort.’

I replied that I endeavoured, as far as possible, to avoid interfering with personal affairs.

‘And so do I, as a rule,’ said her ladyship. But what a fib it was. ‘I think personal matters are always best left to the people concerned. But everyone is not so reticent, and I do assure you I have heard many ill-natured remarks. I begin to be quite sorry for poor dear Mrs. Berri-thorne.’

I was sure that poor dear Mrs. Berri-thorne needed none of the pity which Lady



Matilda, out of the riches of her hard cast-iron Christianity, was likely to give. And I began to feel the rising of irritability within me, as in the old times. Only in the old times it was of less consequence, as I did not generally have to take part in the conversation when the mistress of Willoughby Hall began to lecture us. This afternoon, alas ! I was a free lance. I had the field all to myself.

Lady Matilda continued.

‘ I do think that young men, and especially clergymen, should be very careful how they allow themselves to be drawn into intimacies with people of Mrs. Forrester’s type. I consider her a most dangerous associate for a married man. An elegant and fascinating woman who does not find satisfaction in her own home, ought to be avoided like the plague.’

That was a sweeping remark, but I let



it pass. Dear Lady Matilda made it with such a domestic air. One might have thought that Mr. Rakeridge was a model of all the virtues. Yet we knew well enough he was nothing of the kind.

‘I saw very clearly,’ she continued, ‘indeed it was patent from the beginning, when she lived with you as Miss Consett, that she was a person of the shallowest character, and also that she was bent upon making a conquest of Mr. Berrithorne. No one could see them together without being convinced of that fact. I suppose, when she was disappointed in that direction, she turned her thoughts to Mr. Forrester, and succeeded better. But it is an ill-assorted match, most ill-assorted.’

‘Is it?’ I said. ‘I am very sorry.’ And that was all.

Lady Matilda looked at me with astonishment depicted on her face.



‘My dear Miss Haseltine! Is it possible you do not know? Why everyone in Burstborough society talks about it! It was never likely that a shallow, flimsy little coquette like Seline Consett could satisfy a man of superior intellect. She caught his fancy, and he gave way to his feelings, and now he is reaping the consequences. He gives his whole mind to college and public work. You scarcely ever see them together, I am told, and she talks with the utmost effrontery about her independence of him. Of course he himself is very much to blame. Even if a woman is ever so vain and shallow, the man who has been foolish enough to marry her ought to show the attention required from a husband.’

I could have told Lady Matilda that Seline had bought her husband with a lie, and that probably now he knew it, and the



knowledge might account for a little of his want of attention. But I held my peace. Lady Matilda could make quite enough out of the materials at command without any additions of mine.

‘You see,’ she continued, ‘Mrs. Forrester is a woman who will have admiration, the admiration of men, and if her own husband does not give it, then she will have it from some one else’s husband. And no one can ever tell to what extent that sort of thing may go. That is why I think Mr. Berri-thorne is so very imprudent. He is placing himself in a most dangerous position, and some one ought to caution him.’

I fired up now.

‘Lady Matilda,’ I said, ‘I do not think you ought to make any insinuations against my brother-in-law. He is a gentleman and a Christian.’

And so he was, though, truth to tell, I



think he might have been more of both. But I was not going to let Lady Matilda think that she might sit in judgment on any of my relations.

She continued, in a perfectly matter-of-fact manner, taking no heed of my indignation,

‘My dear Miss Haseltine, I insinuate nothing. I only say that your brother-in-law is acting very foolishly. It would be a most kind proceeding on the part of his friends to tell him so. And I was intending to say to your mother, if I had found her at home, that Mrs. Forrester ought also to have a word of warning spoken to her. When a married woman accepts so openly the attentions of another than her husband, she places both herself and the gentleman in a very ambiguous position.’



‘I think you had better tell Mrs. Forrester this,’ I replied, as quietly as I could, though I am afraid, after all, the quietness only extended to my voice. I felt very angry, and most likely I looked so. ‘The matter would seem to touch her more closely than myself.’

‘I cannot do that,’ said Lady Matilda, who, though enjoying roast chestnuts as much as anyone, declined to take them out of the fire with her own fingers. ‘I should say that your mother, having had the charge of Mrs. Forrester when she first came to England, is decidedly the most suitable person to convey any rebuke which might be received with a spirit of opposition. And I also think, my dear Miss Haseltine, that you might with advantage give your sister a caution. Probably she knows nothing of the rumours which are floating about. Such things are often



most studiously kept from the knowledge of those who would be painfully interested in them.'

I told Lady Matilda that I would have nothing to do with it.

She put on her eye-glasses and looked at me, and then wriggled them off with the grimace which always came into action on that occasion.

'You will find yourself mistaken, Miss Haseltine; but I have done my duty, and I can say no more. It would be a most friendly act to caution Mr. Berrithorne. It may be only want of thought. I must say I never considered him a man of great mental calibre, though endowed with more than average pulpit powers. At the same time his position requires most careful guarding. Do I really understand, then, that you decline to mention the subject to your sister?'



‘Yes, Lady Matilda. I shall not speak to her about it at all.’

‘Then I shall,’ said her ladyship, who was less afraid of burnt fingers when the fire in which the chestnuts were being roasted was only that of my sister’s indignation. ‘I assure you I am actuated by the most disinterested motives, and nothing but a sense of duty would make me interfere. But this is so clearly a case of that kind that I should feel reproached by my own conscience if I did not follow the course of action which I have decided upon.’

And after a few other remarks, she departed.

I thought afterwards I might have been more polite. I might have listened in silence to what she had to say, and then let the whole thing pass. I might even have gone through a form of thanksgiving



for the kindly interest she took in our family affairs, and afterwards thought my own thoughts by way of Amen to it. But with me, prudence always came too late. I was wise after the event, instead of before.

However, where the matter had begun, there it should end, so far as I was concerned. And I never mentioned, either to my mother or Aunt Sunshine, what Lady Matilda had said.



## CHAPTER X.

I SUPPOSE that feminine censor of manners and morals must have been dropping hints in various directions, or it might have been only my own over-sensitiveness, which was stirred by what she had already said ; but certainly I did fancy that many chance remarks made to me after that, by Willoughby and Burstborough gossips, had reference to the relations between Mrs. Forrester and Mr. Berrithorne. At any rate, I began to feel ill at ease when one or the other was mentioned, and I am afraid my manner betrayed me if a question was asked, or even the



most friendly interest manifested about this bazaar and the part which they were to take in it.

This was the case, though I knew well enough that they were both of them perfectly innocent of evil intent. Rowland was vain, and Seline Forrester selfish, few women more so ; but both of them possessed a genuine respect for appearances, and they were also distinguished by an entire absence of that fiery, impulsive temperament which sometimes leads nobler natures wrong. Mr. Berrithorne, with his numerous weaknesses, was right at the core, only the core was so small when you got to it. As for Seline, Lady Matilda had rightly measured her when she said she must have amusement, attention, flattery, Having these, the soul within her was content. She wanted nothing more from her husband or anyone else.



I was not surprised to hear that her home life failed to satisfy her. I knew that she could not feel any interest in Mr. Forrester's pursuits. I knew that she only looked upon his profession as a convenience for bringing funds into the household treasury, and upon his labours amongst the poor as a disagreeable impediment to his attendance upon her at public entertainments. At the same time, she got all that she bargained for in her marriage, a comfortable home and an easy position, and I should have thought the worldly common-sense she so suddenly developed after Major Consett's death, would have shown her that she must accept both the advantages and disadvantages of the matrimonial arrangement with silence if not content.

As for Mr. Forrester. But I had to leave all that. Why should people be



always moralising? Doubtless the boys at the college, as well as the poor folk of Burstborough, were reaping the harvest grown on the desolated fields once intended to yield a different crop. They do say that autumn-sown wheat, killed by the false and cruel winds of early spring, makes the ground into which it decays more serviceable for the seed which is afterwards cast in. And this may be also true of the soul's agriculture.

Towards Whitsuntide of this year the Burstborough newspapers and bill-posting stations began to swarm with advertisements of the approaching grand Oriental bazaar, to be held in the Town-hall. It was to be opened by the mayor, who was a member of the St. Aidan's congregation, though not a parishioner. Lady Matilda had been asked to allow her name to appear on the list of lady patronesses, but



she had declined. However, the Duke and Duchess of Burstborough had not been so particular. They gave their names, and also a handsome contribution of tropical plants, and promised to make purchases, though they might not be able to be present in person. The bishop's wife allowed her name to be amongst the list of patronesses, and so did Lord and Lady Avonbridge, so that, after all, Lady Matilda's refusal might not count for much.

Mrs. Maxwell, the wife of the vicar of St. Aidan's, had called to ask her ladyship of Willoughby this favour. The manner in which it had been refused convinced her that there was something wrong, and a carefully-pointed remark or two afterwards made the root of the displeasure manifest. Mrs. Maxwell then went to Mrs. Laceford Brackenbury of Poole Hall upon



the same errand, namely, to ask Mrs. Brackenbury to allow her name to appear upon the list of patronesses, and Mrs. Brackenbury had given the same answer, accompanying it with remarks of a similar nature to those of Lady Matilda. The vicar's wife then called upon the mayoress, and mentioned the matter to her, saying she did not believe a word of it. It was nothing but Lady Matilda's meddlesomeness, but at the same time it was a pity such remarks should get about, especially when they referred to a man in Mr. Berri-thorne's position, and she hoped he would be careful for the future. It would be too dreadful if his influence amongst the people were damaged by gossip of that kind.

The mayoress of course mentioned the subject to certain of her friends, with the same guarding of reserve and regret, and the end of it was, as we found out after-



wards, that a very convenient train had been laid, which a single spark, dropped as it were accidentally, would be sufficient to light.

The important day arrived, and the bazaar was opened amidst ringing of bells, firing of guns, and fanfare of trumpets. I must say it did credit to Mrs. Forrester's artistic skill and the industry of Mr. Berri-thorne, to say nothing of Mr. Gobridge's efforts, to which ample justice was done in the newspaper reports. Except for the Oriental idea, there was nothing specially original about it, but that idea was enough to invest the whole thing with romance and novelty. The various little money-making devices of ordinary bazaars, the post-offices, the wheels-of-fortune, the raffling-boxes, the luggage-offices, all took on new charms when administered and presided over by Alladins and Zuleikas and



Akbars and Aurungzebes in the blackest of eyebrows and the most brilliant of tunics and scarves and turbans.

Mrs. Forrester, in yellow cashmere draped with pomegranates, and a 'sarree' of transparent china-crape, through which the ornaments on her forehead, ears, and arms gleamed with subdued lustre, looked perfectly charming as postmistress in the crimson howdah, one of the college boys dressed as a mahout, sitting on the elephant's neck to hand up the shillings and hand down the letters to be given in exchange for them. I had never seen any costume become her so completely. She had no need to touch-up her eyebrows, for Nature had already made them black and glossy enough, but she had stained her eyelids with something dark, and put a wash of it under her eyes, and the effect of it was to make them seem



wonderfully large and bright. And her movements had a certain Oriental grace and leisureliness, in keeping with the elephant, and the 'sarree' draped itself in such soft folds about her, and the scarlet and yellow heightened the rich tints of her complexion, to which excitement had already lent an unusual glow, and in short she was as lovely a Damayanti, not to call it postmistress, as any old Hindoo poet need have imagined. In course of time, however, she found it dull up there on the elephant all by herself, and one and another of the Husseins and Hussans and Aurungzebes who were wandering about, looking rather uncomfortable in their baggy trousers and curled-up slippers and embroidered jackets and scarlet turbans, received a summons to come and bear her company.

Now I was with my sister Anne during



the whole of that first day at the bazaar, and I could bear testimony to the fact that Seline bestowed her favours with the utmost impartiality. All she desired was some one with a handsome turban and an effective set of moustaches and eyebrows, false or otherwise, to 'group' with her own costume, and relieve the monotony of matters in the postal department. But it so chanced that as Lady Matilda was passing along that end of the room—she had just looked in with the Poole Hall party, she explained to my sister, to see how things were going on, not that she cared for bazaars, but one had duties to society—as she was passing along that end of the room, then, Akbar the Magnificent, otherwise my brother-in-law, Mr. Berrithorne, having been dispensing fortunes for some time from his audience chamber, and wanting a little variety, had got a fierce-looking



Goorkha to take his place, whilst he relieved the junior curate of St. Aidan's as Damayanti's companion on the top of the elephant. He was an imposing enough Akbar, the turban and moustache making a great difference.

'It is *not* as it should be,' whispered Lady Matilda to me. She had just discharged her duty to society and the organ fund by buying a couple of sixpenny Japanese fans from a little painted boy. 'I do wonder, Miss Haseltine, your sister allows it.'

And later in the morning she came up to me with a still more severe expression behind her gold eye-glasses.

'Miss Haseltine,' she said, 'your brother-in-law ought to have arranged that the trappings of that elephant should be a trifle longer.'

'Indeed,' I replied, quite innocently.



‘I was only just thinking how very well they had been managed.. I think an elephant’s trappings should always clear the ground thoroughly, or the fringes get so spoiled. You know that trapping is the table-cloth from the Mansion House dining-room, and nothing must happen to it.

Lady Matilda twitched off her eyeglasses.

‘Yes, but it should have hung down six inches lower, so as completely to hide anyone standing behind it. I have passed and repassed several times within the last quarter-of-an-hour, and Mr. Berrithorne and Mrs. Forrester appear to be having a most interesting conversation down there in the corner. You see the howdah is empty just now. I can recognise the slippers of Akbar and Damayanti quite plainly. Really, Miss Haseltine, this



affair almost approaches a scandal. It *ought* to be inquired into.'

I could have told her that if she had taken the trouble to inquire into it herself, by pushing aside the trappings and going into the corner behind the elephant, she would have found three pairs of feet, instead of two, the third pair belonging to my sister Anne, who had gone to take Akbar and Damayanti some ice cream, for it was very hot on the top of the elephant, now that the room was becoming crowded. But I was so thoroughly annoyed that I did not care to reply at all. I did think Lady Matilda was so mean, to keep on imputing bad motives to people, and putting evil constructions on everything they did. I believe I was rude enough to turn away without making any reply at all, and I could do that the more easily because the little painted boy just then began to



flourish his Japanese fans in my face, beseeching me to invest sixpence in them; whilst at the same time a Mussulman woman, none other than the daughter of the headmaster of the Burstborough college, flung her veil gracefully back, and thrust a cluster of tuberose into my hand, saying I could have them for half-a-crown.



## CHAPTER XI.

BEING tired as well as vexed, I went into the balcony at the end of the hall, and there as I watched the many-coloured picture below me and the constantly changing groups of figures, I could meditate at my leisure, though the meditations were not exactly sweet.

From an artistic point of view, the aspect of the room was really very effective. Seline had a true eastern feeling for colour and magnificence of detail. Then the warm terra-cotta of the walls, and the pale-blue of the ceiling, powdered with golden stars,



reflected their glow upon the half-fantastic, half-barbaric spectacle beneath. There, in one corner, backed up by a towering mass of palms and bananas, was the elephant with its table-cloth trappings, and its gilding, and its tassels, and its fringes, and its little boy mahout in scarlet and purple, and its crimson velvet howdah from which, not Damayanti and Akbar now, as I was thankful to observe, but another couple of respectively veiled and turbaned Hindoo celebrities, transacted the post-office business. Next came the fountain, overhung by more palm-trees. On its brink sat young girls in Mussulman costume, selling sweets. Next appeared the temple, a couple of Brahmins sitting on the ground at its entrance, a yellow flag with Hindoo symbols fluttering from its pointed roof. The interior was being utilised as an office for the reception of umbrellas and parcels,



which could be taken care of at a trifling cost whilst their possessors wandered about at large. I rather questioned the good taste of this, but Mr. Berrithorne said it was a very paying thing. Then there was the hall of audience, lovely from a distance with its arabesque work cut out in paste-board, and tastefully illuminated in blue and gold, and the little mosque made to imitate marble, with coloured lamps inside, and a tiny fountain of eau-de-Cologne, in which people might dip their fingers or scent their handkerchiefs for a penny each. The good taste of this also I questioned, but no doubt it was a device which paid as well as the luggage-office inside the temple.

Then the stalls were made like the verandahs round an Indian courtyard, closed over with lattice work of rich eastern pattern and colour, and intermingled with



glowing beds of flowers and clusters of ferns and tall tropical plants; and the dames who presided over them were dressed like Hindoo Begums and Ranees, with heavy ropes of amber and pearl round their shoulders, and golden ornaments upon their foreheads, and bangles with silver coins which tinkled whenever they moved about. And a scent of cedar and sandal wood and of costly Indian stuffs seemed to fill the air, and one only wanted a few snakes and centipedes, and a thousand or two of lizards with their brilliant jewel-like eyes, to make the place a veritable Bombay in miniature.

Conspicuous in the centre of the room was the triumphal car in which Rama and Sita were shortly to commence their progress. Whilst I was admiring the splendour of its canopies and fringes, two little boys in tunics of scarlet, with skull caps of gold



and silver tinsel, sprang up at the back of it and began to wave huge peacock-feather fans. Next came Mr. Berrithorne, dressed as Rama, in a long purple mantle with a towering head-dress of cloth of gold, surmounted by an aigrette. He handed Mrs. Forrester, who made a most lovely Sita, all yellow cashmere, purple silk, and coral festoons, into the car. A dozen college boys, chosen for their black hair and eyes, and robed in bright red, took hold of the cords, a troop of Indian maidens handed in wicker trays of flowers; the band struck up a dreamy, murmurous strain of music, the peacock feathers waved, the gold and silver tinsel sparkled, the spangles shone, and Rama and Sita commenced their triumphal progress, she gracefully offering her bouquets of flowers, which admiring spectators might buy for as much as they chose to give.



‘Very effective and really most original,’ remarked some one behind me. ‘I never saw anything in the least like it before. I call it quite a magnificent spectacle.’

‘But fantastic in the extreme,’ replied another lady, whose voice I recognised for that of Lady Matilda Rakeridge. ‘I slightly question the good taste of it.’

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ said the other. ‘So long as a thing is novel, it may be what else it likes. Are those little boys real or stuffed? Those little boys I mean with the great feather fans. They are so covered up with scarlet and silver and gold that you can scarcely tell what they are made of.’

‘Oh, real,’ said a third voice, ‘*quite* real. Can’t you see how they are laughing underneath their painted faces? But what is it all about? Is it a marriage, or what is it? And who are the people in yellow



and purple sitting under the canopy, with the flowers? She is very handsome.'

'Mrs. Forrester, the wife of the second-master at the college, and Mr. Berrithorne, the senior curate of St. Aidan's,' replied Lady Matilda, in a voice of such concentrated asperity that I felt I must turn round and let her see I was there.

'Very quaint, is it not?' I said. 'I hope you are enjoying it.'

Lady Matilda twitched off her eyeglasses.

'*You* here, Miss Haseltine! I thought I left you downstairs. Yes, it is very pretty, but a curious mixture. I feel myself in quite a heathen atmosphere. I hope the thing will be successful.'

Then she moved away with her two companions.

I saw them all by-and-by, amongst the throng in the centre of the room, her lady-



ship looking more severe than ever as she criticised Rama and Sita smiling and bowing under their peacock feathers. I must say I did wish the car had been occupied by some one else, for I felt sure we should hear something about it before long. But if the Hindoo divinities noticed her severity it did not appear to affect them. They seemed thoroughly to enjoy their position, both of them, and the number of shillings, sixpences, and half-crowns which Sita tossed into her embroidered bag during that triumphant progress must have gone a long way towards the expenses of the bazaar. Very soon after that I came away.

The entertainment lasted four days, concluding on the Saturday. I remained with Anne over the Sunday, intending to return to Willoughby on the Monday. Each day the *Burstborough Chronicle* gave a column of description, praising the dresses, scenery,



and general arrangements ; and on the Saturday there was a leading article about the bazaar, most appreciative and eulogistic. I think all the people who had had to do with it felt that they were rewarded. Mr. Berrithorne and Mrs. Forrester were specially congratulated upon the artistic skill which they had shown in the planning and designing of the whole. We had arrived at a new era, the article said. Bazaars were no longer the enterprises of amateur shopkeepers, they had taken their place amongst the fine arts, and might henceforth rank with picture galleries, museums and other intellectual recreations.

Mr. Berrithorne's labours did not end with that Saturday. On the Sunday evening he was to preach a special sermon, with special offertory for the organ fund. This offertory would, it was hoped, with the



proceeds of the bazaar, furnish the sum required, so that the improvements might be started at once.

He had taken unusual pains with this sermon. I think he had put into its composition the best effort of which he was capable. Anne and I were both at St. Aidan's on that evening. To our surprise, Lady Matilda was there, not with the Poole Hall people, but in one of the front pews, almost under the pulpit. There was an unusually large congregation, indeed the church looked almost brilliant. The Mayoress was there. The Poole Hall people were in their accustomed seat, well towards the front, but not so near the front as Lady Matilda. There were also other strangers, whom I recognised as belonging to county families, people not usually to be seen at church, except in the velvet-cushioned amplitude and cur-



tained seclusion of their own country parish pews, where they sat as much apart from the common folk as Rama and Sita amongst their peacock feathers at the bazaar.

Rowland Berrithorne would be pleased, for he never failed to note the presence of members of the aristocracy. It was not, however, difficult to do this in a congregation like St. Aidan's. The fashionable folk of the parish were in the habit of putting on their gayest clothes to come to church. One might have thought, to sit there of a summer Sunday, that you were at a flower-show or a fancy fair, such a glow of silk and satin, such a bustling of brocade, such a floating and fluttering of laces, ribbons, and streamers did the worshippers manifest, as they stood or knelt at their devotions. Whereas the county families, when they deigned to appear,



were conspicuous by their plainness of attire, and the serenely unconscious air with which they met the scrutinizing glances of the wealthy parishioners. They had other places than church in which to display the skill of their ladies'-maids.

The prayers were over. The hymn before the sermon had been given out. The low tones of the organ were rolling softly through the aisles. The senior curate had ascended the pulpit, and was surveying the sea of bonnets beneath him. I have known clergymen spend that short interval in private devotion, but Rowland always got through his little pulpit prayer quickly enough to have a leisurely view of the congregation, whilst the later verses of the hymn were being sung.

Lady Matilda, sitting there in the very front seat, found the place in her hymn-book, and rose with the rest for the sing-



ing. But as soon as Mr. Berrithorne had finished his short prayer, and had flattened his sermon case upon the desk, and arranged his hood, and was now gazing with calm satisfaction upon the assembly of fashion and aristocracy, she closed her book. There was a little preliminary rustle of silk as she gathered up her handkerchief, smelling-salts, and fan; and then, with an aspect sterner even than that of the Cassandra who in Willoughby woods had confronted us with our neglect of the means of grace, she sailed majestically down the middle aisle, followed by the buttons who carried her big prayer-book, and who looked, in his small way, quite as important as his mistress.

Was her ladyship ill? Had she suddenly turned faint? Would the wardens and sidesmen come forward with glasses of water or something stronger?



No. With firm step and upright mien, onward she went. Buttons opened the door, and she disappeared from view. Next rose the Mayoress and proceeded down the aisle in like manner.

It meant something. I began to know what it meant. Still better did I know when Mrs. Laceford Brackenbury of Poole Hall also got up and went out, accompanied by the lady who had been with Cassandra in the balcony looking at Rama and Sita. And all of them went out with the same majestic expression of injured dignity upon their countenances.

I felt myself turning cold as any stone, but I sang on as if nothing had happened. It was a concerted scheme. Lady Matilda had planned it all. And it was only the beginning of more terrible things.

I thought that hymn would never come to an end. My hands trembled so that I



could scarcely hold the book. The silks and satins, the laces and velvets, the flowers and streamers quivered and danced in an indiscriminate mass before my eyes, yet still I sang on and made no sign. I would not even turn my head, as one rustle after another intimated that more departures were taking place. It seemed to me as if the church were emptying itself, so magnified was the sound which each aggrieved worshipper made in walking down that long-drawn aisle. I began to wonder if Anne and myself were the only congregation left. I felt a relief beyond the expression of words when, the hymn being at last over, there was sufficient sound of people settling down in their places to convince me that somebody was left to preach to. I took courage to turn my head by-and-by, and the church appeared as full as if nobody had left it.



Still it was not the numbers that had left, but it was the importance of the units. With a terrible weight at my heart, I sat through that sermon, and then walked home with my sister, feeling that we had had the first drops of a thunder-storm whose full fury might sweep us into annihilation.



## CHAPTER XII.

How it would fall, or who should be the first to feel its effects, I could not foresee. Anne thought it was the gas, though people did not generally perceive it so much at the top of the church, where Lady Matilda and the Poole Hall people had been sitting, and she said that for her own part she had seldom felt the church more comfortable, so far as that was concerned. But really sometimes there seemed to be a sort of epidemic of coming out of church. One lady fancied she was faint, and took her departure; then another, and when two had gone out, it spread



like hysteria or the measles. First one bonnet and then another began to shake and fidget ; the poor vergers got no peace, so frequently had they to jump up and down to open the doors, and the clergyman himself was most of all to be pitied, for nobody listened to his sermon until it was more than half over.

This was what my sister Anne said as we came home together from church. Rowland, for his part, was quite as unsuspecting as to the real cause of the defections. On his return he appeared slightly ruffled at the withdrawal of so many of the greater lights of the congregation, especially when he had prepared a sermon more brilliant than usual. For the sermon fell a little flat, of course. The subdued restlessness which the departure of Lady Matilda and the mayoress and the Poole Hall people produced, continued more



or less throughout the remainder of the service. People kept slipping out by ones and twos. If the gas had affected the upper ten, why should it not affect themselves? And if it was heat or closeness, they had as good a right to feel it as anyone else. The mayoress was not such a very great lady, after all. Air that was good enough for them to breathe, was good enough for her; and, if she found it stifling, why then they would get up and come out too, just to let her see that they were as good as herself.

So that the sermon was not exactly a success. The offertory fell considerably below what might have been expected. In fact, Mr. Berrithorne said he should not allow it to be mentioned in the papers at all, for it was not up to what he was accustomed to get at St. Aidan's when he came there, almost as an unknown man, four



years before. I said nothing ; I could but sympathise in silence and fear.

Next morning I returned to Willoughby. Lady Matilda, I learned, was away from home. She had been staying at Burstborough all the week, and would be likely to remain there some little time longer. That was not reassuring, but I still held my peace.

A few days later, Anne came over to us, seriously disturbed. Rowland had been summoned to the Bishop's palace, to appear before his lordship and answer to some unpleasant reports which had been laid at his door. These reports referred to matters in connection with the recent bazaar in the Town Hall. Further inquiry was to be made into them, and, until this had been done, the Bishop requested that my brother-in-law would not again occupy the pulpit of St. Aidan's.



This was more serious than I could have expected. I knew that Lady Matilda could make herself very disagreeable, and had upon occasion a most sincere satisfaction in doing so. But that she would go to the extent of damaging a man's reputation, putting such an evil construction upon things in themselves innocent as to necessitate inquiries and suspensions, this I never imagined. I honestly believed that she had arranged to go out of church, and had persuaded others to do the same, in order to annoy Mr. Berrithorne, and to spite myself. I had been a foolish woman to fly in her face when she called upon us. I ought to have taken meekly her little whips and stings. I should have acquiesced, said I was very sorry, thanked her ladyship for taking the trouble to come and tell me scandals about my relations, and parted from her in apparent peace.



and good-will, whatever my internal feelings might have been.

Of course, of course. One always knows what one ought to have done when it is too late to do it. My poor sister would doubtless be harried and worried now for months to come, even if things got smoothed over, as I had no doubt they would, between Rowland and the Bishop. She was a proud woman, and would never be able to forget the slur cast upon her husband. Even if it made her love him the more, knowing he was innocent, still there was the insult of suspicion. Then we had made an enemy of Lady Matilda, for we all knew this had come from her, and she would soon know that we knew it, and she would feel herself bound to act up to what she had already done. What limits are there to the petty mortifications a woman of commanding social position is able to



heap upon those who have the misfortune to be her inferiors in nothing but money and rank? She can be more cruel than a horsehair shirt, more stinging than a whip of scorpions, if only her cleverness is in proportion to her position. And Lady Matilda had abilities.

We waited anxiously for further manifestations of the episcopal will. Her ladyship continued visiting about in the neighbourhood of Burstborough. We even heard she had been a guest at the palace. That was not in our favour. Rumours were apparently flying about, for my sister received vague little notes of sympathy from divers of the pew-holders, assurances that nothing could make any difference to their respect for her—with a strong line under the last pronoun—and hopes that whatever might be the end of the present difficulty, she would be able to keep up



her spirits, and for the sake of her family preserve a cheerful appearance. Then from others inquiries. Was Mr. Berri-thorne ill? The congregation had been *so* disappointed not to see him in church on the previous Sunday. Or was he only taking a holiday after the fatigues and anxieties of the bazaar? And if so, when should they have the pleasure of hearing him preach again, for really their chief attraction to the church was—and so on.

Finally, after a period of very painful suspense, the Bishop intimated to Mr. Berri-thorne his wish that he should resign the curacy. That being done, the matter would be allowed to drop.

Of course 'that' was done, and as speedily as possible. But everyone in Burstborough soon knew that something unpleasant had occurred, something which had had to be laid before the authorities,



and which had resulted in what might be called a dismissal from the curacy. Most probably that meant leaving Burstborough, and in that case what about the debts which had been accumulating for so many months?

Mr. Gobridge very naturally took the alarm. So did many other tradesmen who had been concerned in the furnishing of the new house, and in the bazaar decorations, for which Mr. Berrithorne had made himself responsible. Bills were sent in with unpleasant rapidity, accompanied by requests for immediate payment. Then came threats of legal measures if these long out-standing accounts were not discharged within a certain time. Then came lawyers' letters.

The end of it was, that about a month after his lordship's decision, there was a sale at the senior curate's house, the pro-



ceeds of which, together with what my mother, Aunt Sunshine, and myself could raise, and the greater part of Anne's remaining little property, were sufficient to pay the creditors in full. None of the Burstborough tradesmen were a penny the poorer for my brother-in-law's imprudence, and that was one comfort. He, my sister Anne, and the little Phyllis came to us at Willoughby, until some permanent arrangement could be decided upon, and so terminated Rowland's career as a popular preacher.

It was then that David Carlton showed himself a true friend. I believe he had watched Mr. Berrithorne closely for some time. He had often had conversations with my mother about him. He knew him to be weak, easily influenced through his vanity, a very child in the hands of those who wanted to make a tool of him ;



but still with no hopelessly rooted evil habits, no failings which steady self-control, combined with wholesome abstinence from the strong drink of popular applause, would not in time overcome. He had faith, not that the blurred page might be torn out—the schoolmaster experience never allows that—but that, a new one being turned over, a fairer record might be written upon it, and the old one only kept for needful humiliation and rebuke.

Mr. Carlton went over to the Bishop and had a long talk with him. Then he went to the vicar of St. Aidan's. Then he asked Rowland Berrithorne to be his own curate at Willoughby, and Rowland thankfully accepted the offer.

Not many men would have had courage to fly in Lady Matilda's face to such an extent, and she the great lady of the parish. But our rector was a man who,



when he had once decided with himself that such and such a course of action was Christian and necessary, never questioned what other people would say about it. He just did the thing. I have no doubt he knew very well that Rowland Berrithorne had been more sinned against than sinning, and that the sin lay even more at Lady Matilda's door than at Mrs. Forrester's.

However that might be, he proceeded to set her ladyship still more at defiance. When it was decided that Mr. Berrithorne was to be the curate of Willoughby, he asked my sister to make her home at the rectory, together with her husband and little Phyllis. Furthermore he intimated that so long as she remained there, she was to be considered not as a guest, but as the lady of the house. And it was so.

He made no secret of this. He told everyone that it was an arrangement con-



venient and agreeable to himself. That being so there need be no further speculation on the part of the parish. My sister Anne was accordingly received with all due respect and took her place in the old home as in the old time my mother had done.

Lady Matilda wrote a very polite letter to her after this arrangement had been notified. She said she should have great pleasure in calling at the rectory, and renewing the former pleasant interchange of courtesies. But she should wish it to be distinctly understood beforehand that this attention was only intended as a mark of respect to the late rector's daughter, and it must not be construed into a condonation of the past, so far as that past applied to Mr. Berrithorne. She felt it due to her own position, as head of society in the parish of Willoughby, to make this matter



perfectly clear, so that her call, when it was made, might be the subject of no misinterpretation.

My sister wrote an equally polite note, in which she declined receiving any attentions which her husband could not equally share. So the call was never made, and we were thenceforth, one and all of us, free of Lady Matilda Rakeridge of Willoughby Hall.



## CHAPTER XIII.

I MUST say I was glad, when the first shock of the whole affair was over, to have severed our connection with Burstborough, as of course it had to be severed by the giving up, under what our friends called 'painful circumstances,' of the St. Aidan's curacy.

I felt from the first that Rowland's life there was destroying what capacity for good there was in him. His little craft, only a little craft at best, was carrying far too much sail. A skilful captain was needed to watch every change of wind, or



a sudden squall would arise, seize upon the outspread canvas and capsize the boat. He did not so much as know there was danger, and so he never guarded against it.

Then, even apart from the vanity which had shipwrecked him, Rowland Berrithorne was not the man to be placed in a position where much variety of knowledge or experience was required. He had a certain amount of ability, which, judiciously spread over a given surface, would last for a given time; but this ability was not self-supporting or self-existent. It was like electroplate, which at certain intervals must be returned to the factory for a new coating. And in a place like Burstborough, where the metal was so constantly rubbed, the under surface very speedily manifested itself, especially when the corroding acid of popularity was scarcely ever absent. A



better man than Rowland would have fared badly under such unkindly influences.

You soon got to the end of what he had to give you. His pulpit talent always reminded me of a town garden which has to be supplied at regular intervals from the florist's shop, and can neither nourish nor develop the plants which are put into it. They live for awhile with such life as they bring with them from the shop. They manage to get a flower or two into bloom, make a show for a week or two, and then they shrivel up and must be replaced by others. Rowland had great skill in choosing his plants from the stores of the theological and oratorical florists. He arranged them with good effect in the town garden of his very limited mind, and when they began to wither he pulled them up. They had never really taken root, never gathered any nourishment from the poor soil in



which they were planted. It was easy to replace them by others. The Burstborough library was his florist's shop. A few books, a little copying, a judicious throwing together of anecdotes and extracts, and the garden presented a brilliant appearance. Everyone came to look at it and was delighted. Only those who cared for him best, felt how much more satisfactory a rich soil would have been, one open to the air and sunshine of wholesome influences, one into which the spade of reflection could delve deep down, and into which the seed of a fruit-bearing harvest might have been cast.

Anne, I knew, was ill at ease amongst her Burstborough surroundings. She had the dignity which cannot stoop to shifts and pleas and excuses. Their position in a large, showily-furnished house, with none of its luxuries paid for except in niggling



instalments, painfully wrung out of the housekeeping money, galled her to the quick. She would have been happier in a four-roomed cottage, and she would have so ordered her life in it that people whose respect was worth anything would have respected her just the same as if she had been living under the protection of any amount of rent and taxes. The appearances which her husband so much delighted in were a weariness to her. Nothing had any permanent value for her which did not tell upon the upward growth of character. Ornaments of the latest style, curtains of the newest patterns, ebonised furniture of never so costly a design, these things had not a sufficient charm for her. Her life rooted itself in the past. Its leaves, blossoms and fruit were the growth of old associations. They belonged to the soil. Novelty had no precious-



ness in her sight. The old wine was best.

Therefore I think she was as glad as myself when the order of release came, though it came in a somewhat rough and ungracious form. She had, however, within herself, that which took their sharpest sting from outward circumstances. She had confidence in her husband's innocence of what was laid to his charge. He had been weak and foolish. He had lost his balance through the flatteries of a few undiscerning people. He had taken their praises for appreciation. He had laboured after what he thought would raise him in their estimation; and now they had done with him, they had dropped him; but not for any evil-doing of his own, only because he was no longer necessary or convenient to them. I think so dropped, and as some would say humiliated, Rowland Berri-thorne was far dearer to his wife than in



the brilliance of his career as a popular curate he had ever been. And she gave up with a ready mind all that he had once set so much store by—fine furniture, fine friends, fine position, fine prospects—and came to the safe shelter of obscurity with far more gladness than, a few years before, she had gone out from it to pine and weary in the glare of Burstborough notoriety.

We still kept up an occasional intercourse with the Forresters. We none of us felt, and least of all my sister Anne, that what little there was of it need be dropped. I question whether Seline ever heard, until after the final catastrophe, that she had had anything to do with it. I do not think that she, any more than Mr. Berrithorne, had been guilty of the slightest evil intention. She wanted excitement, she wanted attention; she want-



ed something to vary the monotony of a loveless home. And if she did ever hear how much the providing of these necessities had cost, I fancy it would be with the feeling of satisfaction which a pretty woman can scarcely help feeling when a man who has once slighted her gets into trouble not quite unconnected with herself.

Then Rowland's financial difficulties were not made public. The sale was not generally understood to be connected with what are called 'pecuniary embarrassments.' A few of the tradespeople, who had waited long for their money, might gossip amongst themselves, but it was no affair of bankruptcy. And Mr. Carlton's action in appointing Mr. Berrithorne as his curate at Willoughby, and offering him the rectory as a home, quite precluded the chatter of scandal in any other direc-



tion, whatever Lady Matilda might have to say about it. Also, no one knew of the sacrifices we had had to make. We never told people that nearly the whole of Anne's little property, and all the ready money my mother and Aunt Sunshine could gather together, had gone to pay for that showy furniture and the bazaar decorations. We kept our difficulties to ourselves, as we kept many other things, and never asked for sympathy when we could get on without it.

So there came quiet for us at last, the quiet which follows much storm and tossing in the open sea of adversity. I began to honour Rowland Berrithorne as I had never honoured him before. We were all of us touched by the humility with which he accepted the change in his outward position. Now, at last, he began with shame, yet shame that had a touch of



true nobility in it, to take the lowest place.

He would not for a long time do any work in our parish church. Mr. Carlton did not press it, and in that showed his wisdom. I think he kept a very close watch over that slow, painful, upward striving which was the cause of such deep thankfulness to us all. He was not one to thrust inexperience to the front, still less to give folly the precedence of steady, unobtrusive well-doing. The new curate of Willoughby had his character to make. The most hopeful part of its beginning was that quite new desire to be out of people's way, to do what there was to be done without inviting the praise of men upon it.

Accordingly he took up his work in the little mission-room, which was now built—but without help of tableaux and private



theatricals—down at the brickfields ; and there, amongst the rough men, and almost rougher women, who could give him neither compliments nor flattery, who gave him too often instead only rough criticisms and hard words, he toiled patiently on, coming home to the rectory day by day, not for lawn-tennis and afternoon chit-chat, but to take counsel with his own heart in solitude.

One could scarcely have told him for the same. Truly it seemed as if the sunlight were getting down at last into that soil, once so poor and unfruitful ; sunlight and fertilising showers, carrying with them the making of better things for the future. It would never, even now, be soil on which any stately growth could be reared. No depth there for the great forest trees, beneath whose shadow many might come to rest, in whose branches

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birds of the air, great thoughts, great purposes, great aims, might build their nests. But with toil and patience he might so delve that a lowlier crop, less pleasant to the eye, but still good for the common needs of life, might arise upon the ground where once only rootless flowers had been planted in, to make a show for awhile, and then be flung away. And who could tell but that when these humbler crops had, by due growth and rotation, developed the resources of the soil, flowers too might come, flowers which should have root in themselves, and instead of withering away, blossom year by year into fairer beauty?

They say character never changes. I should be sorry to think that is a true saying. We all know well enough how easily it may deteriorate, and it would be hard upon poor human nature, so fatally able to take the downward road, if an up-



ward one were not possible. I will never believe that God does not give as much power to be good as to be evil.

This I know, that Rowland Berrithorne's life did recover strength. I wonder how much of that strength he owed to the faithful love which bore with him and had patience when, in his praise-pampered folly, he thought he had thrown himself away upon a wife who was not good enough for him, who could not help him to achieve a position, who could not gather round him a cluster of fashionable sycophants, first to flatter and then to forsake him; a wife who could only be true to him in her patience and her silence and her cherishing, alike through the applauses of the mob and their revilings, and who never showed him all the wealth of her love until the vain folk for whom he had slighted her had had



their fill of him and cast him aside.

I think Rowland Berrithorne's soul would never need to sink more deeply within him than when he remembered that conversation by my father's fire-side, whilst the robin chased the little white butterfly on the lawn, and we spoke of the merchantman seeking goodly pearls.



## CHAPTER XIV.

ANNE and her belongings had been established at the rectory for several months. During that time we had kept up, as I said, an occasional intercourse with the Forresters. It was very occasional, but it served to keep the link from being quite broken. Mr. Berrithorne and Seline I think never met again. Mr. Forrester brought her over to the rectory once during the summer following that Whitsuntide, but my brother-in-law was at work, as usual, down at the brickfields. And then they came over to the cot-



tage to call upon us, but we too were out, having taken little Phyllis for a day in the woods.

Not long afterwards, it would be towards the winter, I heard that Seline had taken a severe chill at a fancy-ball, to which she had gone in the character of a dragon-fly. I do not feel sure that I should apply the word character to a dragon-fly, but I mean that her costume was to represent that creature. They said she looked lovely in her quivering gauzy wings, and closely-fitting dress of metallic golden green, with bands of vivid blue ; but it was not a comfortable dress for November, and Seline paid rather dearly for the admiration which it excited. She was confined to the house for several weeks, so we heard, by this cold, and got rather depressed. I could quite imagine anyone of her temperament would, by being shut



out so much from the gaieties which were going on at that season. However, she was soon all right again, though not, as we heard, able to go about quite as usual.

Soon after Christmas Anne had occasion to go over to Burstborough, and spent an afternoon with her. She brought us word that Seline had become religious.

This *was* news. We had heard that she had given up going to St. Aidan's, but that we could well enough understand. Rumours might have reached her that her name had been associated with Mr. Berri-thorne's in that bazaar business, and good taste might keep her away from the church, as fashion had taken her there in the first instance. She now went very frequently to a chapel near the college, whose minister, the Rev. Granville Newbury, was said to be a very good and



devoted young man, not much of a preacher, but excellent as a visitor; though what Seline could make of strictly pastoral visits I could not quite imagine.

It was the becoming religious that sounded so oddly to us, and, in close juxtaposition with the dragon-fly entertainment, had a touch of the grotesque about it. However, I had seen so many sudden and unexpected changes in her character—spite of what people say about character never changing—that this too might well take its place amongst the rest. Seline might find prayer-meetings as interesting for awhile as fancy-balls, pastoral visits as entertaining in their way as those non-pastoral ones which Mr. Berithorne used to pay with such regularity when the preparations for that Oriental bazaar were in progress. It was only a



different species of excitement. Her mind, chameleon-like, took its colour from whatever it rested upon. Most likely, during those tedious weeks which she spent in the house after that chill, she became weak and susceptible, both in body and spirit. She wanted stimulus of some kind. Mr. Newbury's visits supplied it. Probably he had also lent her some memoirs like those we used to read aloud to my aunt at Dalton-by-the-Sea, and they might have taken hold of her fancy, and the thing was working itself out in this way.

She seemed as if she were clinging to Anne now, writing to her more frequently, trying to get her over to the college. Her letters contained many references to the state of her own feelings. She was evidently feeding upon them, trying to produce religious emotions and ecstasies. This was not at all in Anne's way, and I



think she felt the correspondence rather a weariness. She was never one who said much about religion, and she wrote still less. Therefore the correspondence wore itself out.

I was much surprised, during the Easter following that Christmas, to receive myself a letter from Mr. Forrester, begging me to go over and spend a week with his wife. She had fallen, he said, into a morbid condition upon religious subjects, and much needed the corrective of a little commonsense companionship.

I was sure Seline must indeed be in a morbid condition if she was beginning to crave society of mine. I was somewhat surprised, under the circumstances, that Mr. Forrester should suggest it. And I resolved within my own mind, with genuine feminine spitefulness, that as Mr. and Mrs. Forrester had managed to do without



me for four years, they might go on doing without me to the end of the chapter.

But he continued to explain matters. He was going up to London after Easter. He very much wished Seline to go too, thinking that a short spell of gaiety, in the shape of concerts and theatres, would get her thoughts out of their present unwholesome groove. But she positively refused to go. She said such amusements were sinful, she would not take part in them. And as he himself was obliged to go, he begged me, as an act of Christian charity, to spend a week at the college house during his absence.

That made Seline's morbid condition a matter of undoubted certainty. To think any form of amusement sinful was quite a new development of character. She herself enclosed a little note, saying how glad she should be to see me, for I had been



very much upon her mind lately, and there were many things she wished to say to me.

Upon that I decided to go. Aunt Sunshine drove me over the day after Mr. Forrester went to London, but she would not cross the threshold of the college-house. She deposited me safely there, and straightway drove away again, promising to come for me that day week.

I hope I shall never spend such another seven days of monotonous and ineffectual weariness. Of all forms of hysterical weakness, and their name is legion, that which assumes the aspect of 'a morbid condition upon religious subjects' is the most aggravating. There is so little of religion in it. It makes such enormous demands upon the unselfishness of other people; it imposes such a tax upon patience and long-suffering. You may argue with it, you may sympathise with it, you



may do what you like with it. It is there, a great, looming, massy cloud, with self as the nucleus and centre of it, and all your efforts do not move it in the least, they only stir the outer edges of the cloud; the rest remains immovable, a dense fact against which faith and reason beat alike in vain.

Mr. Forrester, in his letter, had asked me to discourage as much as possible Seline's references to her own so-called religious experiences, and to lead her to more wholesome subjects of thought. He said I should find it difficult to do this, as her mind was constantly turning in that direction. Still, if it could be done, it would be a great step towards her recovery. A feeble state of physical health, the physician said, had induced this unnatural condition of mind. With returning vigour it would probably pass away,



if, in the meantime, cheerful companionship and rational occupation for her thoughts could be supplied.

But the physician did not know much about Seline, if he supposed she was going to have her occupations found for her. She had always been accustomed to do as she liked. No such thing as mental discipline had ever formed part of the experience of her life. Now, with less power than before of self-control, she was not likely to exercise her will in any direction but that which best suited her own inclinations. Formerly it had been her own external interests, her own enjoyment, her own comfort, her own amusement, upon which the pivot of her life turned. Now this motive had been twisted to an internal direction, but the object, self, was still the same, though looked at through a so-called religious medium.



Still I was not prepared for quite such a sudden manifestation of this state of things as I met with at the very outset of my visit to Michael Forrester's wife.

She did not come out to meet me, but waited my entrance into the drawing-room, and even then did not rise from the couch where, lovely as ever, in bronze cashmere and gold—for perfect taste in colour was one of the very last sinful amusements which poor Seline would be likely to give up—she lay with an Indian shawl flung carelessly over her. There was a little table at her side, with a wine-glass and a dainty cut-glass decanter of invalid port upon it, and several prettily-bound books. The room was darkened with rosy curtains, a scent of flowers stole in from the conservatory, where ferns and mosses, kept green by tiny fountain jets and rills of water, made a kind of perpetual woodland



summer. Everything in the room was rare and costly. One had a feeling of being closed round by luxury—luxury of form, colouring, perfume. One could not turn without seeing something beautiful, something in which art or taste or contrivance had done its best. Life, in that drawing-room at any rate, could not be a vale of tears or a waste, howling wilderness.

Seline, lying on the sofa, stretched out her arms to me.

‘Marjorie, dear, it was so kind of you to come. I have been longing to see you. I have so much to tell you. I am sure you will be glad to know that I am so much in earnest about my soul now.’

It was such a curious announcement to come from Seline, and seemed a little out of keeping with the studied lovelinesses, both of dress and decoration, all around her. I had never found out before that



she possessed a soul to be in earnest about, but if, amongst her miscellaneous goods and chattels, one had turned up, she might do worse than give a little wholesome attention to it. Though truly, the soul being at last found, the most presently appropriate thing to say to it in that drawing-room would seem to be :

‘Thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.’

But I remembered what Mr. Forrester had said about discouraging conversation on subjects connected with this morbid condition of mind, and, being a little tired after my seven miles’ drive in the April cold, I only replied,

‘Well, Seline, shall we have a cup of tea first, and then we can talk about it. Or shall I go and take my bonnet off?’



For the maid had received instructions to bring me to her mistress at once upon my arrival, and here I was, in the dainty drawing-room, with my cloak and my furs and all the rest of my things. And I must say I wanted a cup of tea more than religious conversation.

‘By-and-by, Marjorie. But I must have a talk with you first, for there is so much I want to say to you. Michael would tell you, I have no doubt, that I am quite a changed character now.’

And, straightway, Seline plunged into a diagnosis of her spiritual condition, showing an acquaintance with the corresponding phraseology which astonished me. It was impossible for me to get in a word for some time, so eager was she to explain the whole state of things. And then she said,

‘Do you really mean that Michael never



told you anything about my changed condition of mind?’

‘He told me,’ I replied, ‘that you were not at all well, and asked me to come and stay with you whilst he was away. He said he thought your mind was too much occupied with one sort of thought, and you would do well to turn it to something else.’

Mrs. Forrester sighed as she arranged the velvet band in her hair.

‘Poor Michael! He little knows. He does not understand me. I fear he never will. He seems to have given himself so entirely up to outward things.’

‘What sort of things do you mean?’ I asked.

‘Oh, the college work and going about amongst those poor people. I don’t believe he ever thinks about his soul. And if I speak to him I meet with no sympathy. I



am afraid he thinks he must be saved by works. He does not at all understand the plan of salvation.'

'Perhaps we none of us quite understand that,' I replied. 'It is a little difficult to the cleverest of us.'

'Difficult, Marjorie? To me it is the simplest thing in the world. You have nothing to do but believe—nothing. Faith is all.'

'But faith must show itself by doing something, must it not?'

'Oh! Marjorie, don't talk about *doing* anything. Works are most dangerous things. More souls are lost by works than anything else.'

'Well, I always had an idea that souls were lost by want of them, instead of the contrary. And as most people are not able to comprehend the plan of salvation, they had better in the meantime go about



and do some good in the world. I know at least of two or three families in Burstborough who have been raised out of pauperism by what Mr. Forrester has done for them. How would *you* suggest his spending his time to better purpose?’

‘Oh! he wants knowledge of the truth, Marjorie, the knowledge that has been made so wonderfully plain to *me*. Now if he would but study these delightful little books.’

And Seline directed me to the table, on which I had already noticed a plentiful supply of the most daintily-bound literature.

‘There are more underneath,’ she said. ‘Do look at them.’

I did look. How well I remembered that table, a pretty little ebony thing which my sister Anne had given to her as a wedding present. It was what they call a



windmill table, having revolving shelves underneath, and Seline used to have these shelves full of the British poets, in covers to match the artistic beauty of everything else about her. Now she had changed all that. The stationers' shops of Burstborough must have been ransacked to furnish spiritual sustenance in the mildest, most easily digested form, from penny-worths up to costly manuals in morocco at half-a-guinea. There was 'New Milk for Babes.' There were 'Drops of Comfort,' 'Grains of Wheat,' 'Honey and Flour,' 'Bread Crumbs,' 'Corn in the Desert,' 'Fruit and Oil,' 'Leaves of Healing,' in fact a tempting vegetarian bill of fare for those whose digestion was not able to assimilate strong meat. And they were so prettily bound, the palest shades of sea-green and pink and ivory, with gilt sprays and stars and moons all over them,



and illuminated margins and headlines. One could not be fed more daintily, if that was to be the way.

‘Where did you get them all, Seline?’

‘Ah! it was dear Mr. Newbury who told me about them. He orders them for me, and if ever he sees anything new that he thinks will comfort me, he brings it directly. You know I don’t go to St. Aidan’s now. I have given it up since poor Mr. Berrithorne left.’

I was silent. I wondered whether, in this outpouring of spiritual experience, a touch of self-reproach might come with the memory of St. Aidan’s and poor Mr. Berrithorne.

It did, but not quite as I had expected.

‘Of course you heard all about that?’ she continued, with a faint little touch of coquetry. ‘You see he was not a spiritually-minded man at all. He never preached



the gospel in its fulness. I was very dark all the time I sat under him. And then he was so taken up with worldly things. Was it not dreadful, Marjorie, the way he was taken up with worldly things? no concern, as you may say, for the deep things of the soul. I often reproach myself for having been led away by sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. And I believe I was very naughty about him. I ought not to have drawn him on so, you know. But those were the days of my vanity. I was very——’

‘Oh! Seline,’ I said, ‘you have never once asked after my mother all this time, nor Aunt Sunshine, nor any of us.’

For I began to feel as if I were in an inverted bell glass, with no air to breathe.



## CHAPTER XV.

‘ Ah! yes, poor dear Mrs. Haseltine.’

And Seline drew the Indian shawl comfortably over her shoulders.

‘ I do hope she is very well. So sad for her, was it not, to have to leave that nice old rectory and go into a little poking house like Miss Newcourt’s. It shows how uncertain life is. We are only strangers and pilgrims here below. Mr. Newbury was talking so sweetly about that, a few days ago, and he drew my attention to a delightful little book which he has just brought out. I ordered a dozen copies,



they are only a penny each, so I thought they would do to give away amongst my friends. I do so want to be of use in my poor way amongst those who have not found the truth. It is there, you see, just under the "New Milk." "Cups of Refreshing for Believers." You know I had been passing through very severe temptation just then, and I was feeling so terribly shaken, and I sent a note asking him to come over to me at once. And he did, dear man ! though he was just in the middle of dinner, so kind of him, wasn't it ? But he knows what a shaken reed I am when the adversary attacks me in this way, and it is such a comfort to be able to send for some one who really understands me.'

Poor Seline ! Back again to herself. Always back again to herself. Well, well. Perhaps it would be better to let her have



it out, once for all. The stream must surely come to an end, sooner or later.

‘ You see Mr. Berrithorne never really understood me,’ she continued. ‘ He had never been brought to a knowledge of the deep things of the kingdom, and I was then very vain and foolish. But all that is passed. I am a new creature now.’

Well, so she was. There was no denying that. At any rate she had come under new influences, which were reflecting their special colouring upon her character. At the same time it was her own self upon which all the thought was centred. In that light it could scarcely be allowed that old things had passed away and all things become new. She went on :

‘ Dear Mr. Newbury says mine is a very interesting case. Such a rapid development of the spiritual life. He is only a young man ; but he has great experience



with souls, and he says he has scarcely ever seen anything so wonderful before. He has mentioned my case to many in the congregation, as one of exceptional interest.'

'I think he should scarcely have told you that,' I said, beginning to feel choked again with this unwholesome atmosphere. 'One ought not to be conscious of one's own growth, and I don't see how it can ever do us any good to be held up as models for admiration. It takes a long time to grow a really fine character. One must work at it patiently and silently, as Rowland Berrithorne is doing now. There is the make of a true hard-working Christian in that man, after all, now that he is shaking off all the follies that you helped him to stick on. But it is slow work.'

'Oh! dear, no, not *slow* work,' replied Seline, ignoring alike my reference to Mr. Berrithorne and her share in the deteriora-



tion of his character. 'You don't understand it. In the spiritual life things are so different. You know the beautiful parable of the grain of mustard-seed which sprang up in a single night, and made a shade for the prophet. So instructive, is it not?'

'You mean Jonah's gourd, do you?' I said, for Seline's Biblical research had not kept pace with the rapidity of her spiritual development, and she was still, as in the matter of the old rector's monument, hazy about quotations. 'Jonah's gourd did spring up in a single night, and it withered just as soon, so I hope your case will not hold by that analogy. I think the grain of mustard-seed took a little more time to grow up, and it became a tree, which is a more satisfactory sort of thing than a gourd, and the birds came and lodged in the branches of it, which ought to mean



that it was some sort of use and shelter to them. I do think, after all, it is well to have a little activity along with the meditation ; a pennyworth of bread at any rate, to this intolerable quantity of sack. Perhaps when you get stronger you will go with Mr. Forrester sometimes, and help him in his work amongst the poor. It would be one way of showing your love, both to him and your Master.'

Seline gave a little shudder and gathered up the shawl again.

'No, dear. I shall never be called to active labour in the vineyard. You see there are many ways of being useful. We all have our place, and we must not murmur if we are not given exactly what we want. Mr. Newbury says I am chosen in the furnace of affliction. That is to be *my* way of serving.'

I looked at Mr. Forrester's wife amongst



her velvet cushions in that beautiful drawing-room, with her softly rounded cheeks, and her eyes unshadowed save by the faint stain which, since the bazaar festivities, she had always applied, and her forehead so smooth under its tangle of curling dark hair; and then round about upon the glow and the colour, and the luxury which seemed to clasp one like an invisible caress, and I thought if this was the furnace of affliction, a good many would not object to be chosen in it.

Yet in her own feeble way, Seline was quite earnest. With all her faults she never acted a part. She passed with strange, unexpected rapidity from one phase to another, but she was herself in each. In those first thoughtless weeks of her girlhood amongst us at Willoughby, intent upon conquest and amusement; then turning to the more serious business of



providing for her own future comfort; afterwards, when that comfort was secured, plunging with reckless eagerness into any sort of social excitement, and now at last with equal rapacity of appetite searching into the forms of religion for that which she once looked for in the gaieties of fashionable Burstborough, Seline was still true to herself, absolutely unaffected in her desire to get what would be for her own good, and as absolutely unscrupulous in the means by which she sought to secure it. Still I never thought it would come to this.

‘Mr. Newbury will be sure to come in whilst you are here,’ she went on. ‘I told him I was expecting you. I do hope his visits may be made useful to you.’

I said I did not think they would. I reminded her that people’s natures and dispositions are so different, that what attracts one only repels another.



‘ Ah ! yes, Marjorie dear, but that is because we will not give ourselves up to proper influences. When I first went to hear Mr. Newbury, I never thought he could have worked such a change in me. You see I was so hardened by never having been brought under real Gospel influences at St. Aidan’s. But the Almighty uses feeble instruments, the weak things of this world, you know.’

I ventured to suggest that perhaps Mr. Newbury might not like to be compared to a weak thing of the world. It was scarcely showing proper respect to him or to his ministerial vocation.

‘ Oh ! dear no,’ replied Seline, ‘ nothing of the kind. He is one of the most powerful of preachers. You don’t understand me. It was a quotation I found in one of those sweet little books. What I mean is,



I could never have expected to make such rapid progress. Mr. Newbury himself says he is astonished at my spiritual growth. He says I am maturing for a better world. Delightful, is it not?’

‘Well, Seline,’ I said, ‘let us all hope we are doing that in our own humble way, else it is not much use our being in this world at all. But perhaps you are maturing for some useful work on earth, before you are taken to unknown service elsewhere.’

Seline shook her head.

‘Marjorie dear, will you pour me out a glass of wine. I begin to feel fatigued with the effort of talking.’

‘Oh! do give over, then,’ I said, eagerly.

‘No, thank you, a glass of port will set me up again. Dr. Ratisbone said I was always to have a glass of wine given me



when I felt anything like sinking. It is so necessary for me, you know, to have my strength kept up. The mind, he says, in my case makes great demands upon the physical strength.'

I poured out the wine, Seline drank it. I did not like to hint again at a cup of tea for myself, though by this time it would have been exceedingly refreshing. With the strength which the invalid port had given her, Seline continued.

'You were saying I might be intended for active service in the vineyard below, Marjorie. No, I feel convinced that will not be the case. Mr. Newbury says it is his firm belief that I am marked out for early removal.'

'Then I think, begging Mr. Newbury's pardon, that he has no business to say anything of the kind. It is your doctor's business to tell you that, and until he tells



you it, other people had better let it alone. How can Mr. Newbury know anything about it?’

‘Marjorie,’ and Seline looked slightly aggrieved, as if I had done her an injustice by supposing she was not good enough to die right off. ‘You do not understand. You are so material in your ideas. He considers mine, as I said, a most interesting case, and he can only account for my extraordinary maturity in spiritual things on that principle. Most people have to go through years of preparation for another world, but in my case the work of a lifetime is being done in a single day. You know such a thing is possible.’

‘I am not sure of that,’ I replied. ‘But I do know that in a single day a work may be done which whole years, and even a whole lifetime cannot undo.’



I said this, wondering whether it would lead her thoughts away from herself for awhile, to what she had done for others in the past. Truly one day's work of hers had made a considerable difference to two lives already.

Apparently the words did in some sort smite home, for she said after a pause, in which she might have been reviewing the past,

‘I am afraid I have often been very naughty,

“I was a wandering sheep,  
I did not love the fold,”

You know that sweet little thing, do you not? I keep copies of it all over, because it comforts me so.’

‘Comforts you, what about?’ I asked.

‘Oh, about things generally. I often feel that I have not been what I ought to have been in times past.’



Seline said this in a coaxing, caressing sort of way, as if she were patting herself on the back for being ingenuous enough to own that her whole past life had not been one of spotless rectitude. I was determined, whilst she was still upon that subject, to get to the bottom of what she had said to Mr. Forrester about myself. We had never spoken about it since that evening in the little room over the porch, at the old rectory, where I had so indignantly flung down my grievance, and she with such cool indifference had swept out of the room, leaving me to my own reflections. Now, if she repented of anything, she ought to repent of that. And, if she repented of it, perhaps she would not mind telling me the truth about it.

‘I suppose we all of us have a feeling of that kind,’ I began, vaguely. ‘At least we should not be good for very much



otherwise. We should be rather poor creatures if we never felt we might be better than we are. At the same time I don't see how it is any use feeling in that sort of way, if we don't go a little farther and find out why it is that we ought to feel so. It is no use to stop at calling ourselves miserable sinners. To pin down one actual evil deed and look it in the face, is better than a whole year of General Confessions.

‘Yes,’ said Seline, in the same comfortable tone. ‘Mr. Newbury says we ought to examine ourselves and be willing to be told of our faults.’

‘Then, Seline,’ I replied, boldly, ‘I am going to ask you about one of yours. You remember that evening at Willoughby long ago, the evening Mr. Forrester came to stay with us, when Anne was away. I want to know exactly what it was you



said to him about me. You know I did ask you, a week later on, but you did not tell me.'

Seline toyed with the stem of the wine-glass. Perhaps she was collecting her thoughts.

'Ah, yes,' she said at last, 'I am afraid I was very naughty about that. Dear me! I have often been very naughty. There was poor dear Mr. Berrithorne and the bazaar, and Mr.—oh, I forget his name, on board ship.'

'Never mind the other times just now. I only want to know about what concerns myself, that is, what you said to Mr. Forrester about me.'

'Well, you know,' Seline replied, very much as if she were confessing to breaking a cup and saucer. 'It was ever so naughty of me. I gave him to understand you were engaged to Mr. Berrithorne. Wicked, wasn't it?'



‘Why, Seline, you told me at the time you had not said that. You said you had given him to understand nothing of the sort.’

‘Ah! yes; but, you know, I was in the world then, I had not come out from among them and become separate. I am afraid I often did what I ought not to have done. I feel ever so sorry about it. But it is all past now. I am a new creature.’

‘That is right. But have you ever said to Mr. Forrester that you told him a lie then?’

‘Oh, Marjorie, you do put things so bluntly. It sounds quite dreadful. Yes, I did tell him that I had given him a wrong impression, and then I said my prayers and asked to be forgiven, so it is all right. Everything is blotted out now.’



‘That is a comfortable way of disposing of the past, Seline.’

‘It is the way provided for us in the Gospel, Marjorie dear. I do wish I could bring you to see it in its simplicity, and accept it as applying to all your own guilt and unfaithfulness. Mr. Newbury says everything is blotted out and done with. You need not remember it any more at all. That is why I feel so comfortable.’

‘I should think so,’ I replied. ‘I do not wonder, if Mr. Newbury preaches that doctrine, that you enjoy listening to him. He ought to have all the sinners of Burstborough, fashionable and otherwise, in his congregation. Did he ever preach to you from the text, “God requireth that which is past”?’

‘No, Marjorie. I don’t believe that is a



text at all. It is not according to the Gospel.'

'It *is* a text, though, Seline; and I think some day we shall all of us have to find it out. But I would rather have a cup of tea than any more conversation. And may I ask Kent to bring it to me in my room?'

For truly I had need to be quiet.



## CHAPTER XVI.

THIS conversation was only the beginning of a series, closely corresponding with it in all respects. Indeed, Seline's mind was now only reflective of one kind of colouring, that which came through religious thought, so-called. To all other influences she was entirely irresponsive ; and to this only responsive so far as she was herself interested. In vain I tried to direct her attention to the joys, sorrows, or cares of other people. They were as though they did not exist, except as she could invariably fix upon some one aspect in which



they resembled an experience of her own ; and, starting from that point, she would go off into an interminable disquisition upon her spiritual state. It was to no purpose that I struck in from without. What I said only furnished a fresh starting-point, from which to launch into a deeper depth of subjectivity.

I had never seen anyone in such a condition before. Had I been of a metaphysical turn of mind, or had I been a disciple of moral vivisection, a science only less horrible than its material anti-type, I might have found great interest in experimenting upon her state. You could lay your finger upon no spiritual sore or sorrow which had not its counterpart in her own experience, which would not lead her into more and more talk about herself. She was like a person in the magnetic state ; every touch produced



a response. Her self-concentration, always a prominent feature in her character, had now assumed almost the proportions of insanity. But I think anyone shut up for a whole week with a person who is in a 'morbid condition upon religious subjects' is scarcely in a state to view the phenomenon from an independent point of view. The preservation of one's own equanimity is the first requisite, and, that being accomplished, there is little energy left for psychological researches.

Pascal says that all men are to themselves of some importance. He might have said the same, though in a lesser degree, of all women. Therefore, caring for myself as I did, I was shocked to see how lightly Seline passed over that deliberate falsehood, which had changed my whole life. Of course she was not supposed to know the evil which it had



wrought; but for the falsehood itself, and the motive she had in telling it, she certainly *was* responsible. And yet, having once assured herself that it would not be visited injuriously upon her in the future, she had dropped all consideration of what it might involve for anyone else.

This, of course, did not dispose me favourably to her outpourings. But I question whether conscience had ever been awakened in her at all. I question whether repentance had anything to do with her mourning for sin, or whether the omissions and shortcomings of the past did not present themselves to her in the aspect of an artistic middle-distance, a kind of neutral shadow, necessary for bringing out the vivid lights of her spiritual foreground. But, at any rate, I learned one thing during that visit, to be more than ever sorry for Mr. Forrester. What a weariness



life must be for him, now that he had to spend it with a woman who was for ever talking about what she thought were her eternal interests, but what were in reality a haze of hysterical emotions, capable only of absorbing and enveloping everything in itself.

I once suggested her doing something, as a change from always reading prettily-bound books or building castles in the air about her own condition. I proposed that we should knit a shawl and a hood for a very old, poor woman in whom Mr. Forrester was interested. Such a piece of work would serve three purposes. It would warm and comfort the old woman ; it would have a beneficial influence upon Seline herself, by drawing her thoughts into a new direction ; and it would be a cause of sincere pleasure to her husband, by showing that she wished to identify



herself with his occupations. But it was of no use.

‘I had rather not, Marjorie dear. I think a life of meditation suits me best, but I can tell the servants to do it. I am sure they must have heaps of time. You see I am so easily tired, and then when I get tired, the least thing depresses me, and Dr. Ratisbone says I must never be allowed to get depressed. It is so bad for me, you know.’

‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘and bad for other people too, I should think. It is very trying to be with people who are always in what they call a low key. You almost feel as if you had to apologise for being cheerful yourself.’

‘Oh! dear, no, not in my case. Michael is always so glad when he can get me to be cheerful. You know I have dreadful



temptations sometimes—*dreadful*, and then I get so depressed.’

‘I should think so. Why, if I were not to sew and keep house and go out walking, and do a little carpentering sometimes, I should become so bad-tempered that nobody would care to live with me. Are you not afraid of getting into that condition yourself sometimes?’

Seline looked at me pityingly.

‘Yes, I daresay you *do* get bad-tempered. I always used to think, when I was at Willoughby, and especially towards the end of the time, that your temper was not what it ought to have been. But I don’t mean that in my case; it is temptation. Sometimes it gets so bad that I have to send over for Mr. Newbury, and he comes in and comforts me. He understands my case exactly. He says it is



the most richly-laden tree, whose branches are often dragged down to the ground, and the enemy of souls marks me out as his special prey, because he sees that my soul is so rapidly ripening for glory.'

This was really too much. I made a desperate effort to rush out into the open air of a more general conversation.

'Let us talk of something more interesting than our tempers. Suppose we drive over to Willoughby this afternoon, and gather primroses? You cannot think how lovely they are in the church plantation now.'

'I daresay. And in the shrubbery, too, I should think there are plenty. Do you remember, when I first came to be with you, how I used to gather them to wear in my olive cashmere, and they suited me so well. You know I always looked my best in a touch of yellow. Are there many in the



rectory garden this spring? You might send me a few bunches.'

'I don't know: we do not live at the rectory now, you may remember.'

'Oh! dear, of course. Yes, I had quite forgotten. Poor Mrs. Haseltine! It must have been such a nuisance to leave that pretty place. I know I should have felt it dreadfully.'

'We all felt it,' I replied, quietly. 'But my mother is quite bright and cheerful. It is no use vexing other people with our troubles. I often think it is better to take them as nurses tell little children to take their medicine. Shut your lips upon it, and then it does not taste half so bitter.'

'Yes, but you do not derive the proper benefit from your trials and punishments unless you *do* feel the full bitterness of them, Marjorie.'

Seline said this with a didactic air, which



amused even while it irritated me. Her tone so evidently implied that my mother and I had been doing something wicked, and so Providence, as a corrective measure, had turned us out of our old home. And as one naturally feels vexed at a child, who, when you are obliged to whip it, looks defiantly at you as much as to say, 'Do as you like, I don't mean to cry,' so the Arbiter of human destinies might be supposed to feel a sort of indignation against us, because resentful pride kept us from calling out when we were hurt.

'I don't know,' I said. 'It does not always follow that we get the full benefit of our troubles because we make a great noise about them. And, whatever may be the effect upon ourselves, it is certainly more comfortable for the general public that we should swallow our medicine quietly. But it really is not a question of that sort at



all. We always knew that our home at the rectory must end with my father's death; and instead of lamenting that we had to give it up, we felt we ought to be thankful that we had spent so many happy years there. The past is a possession which we can never lose, whatever else goes.'

Seline little knew what this meant for me, how rich that past had made me, though the present seemed so poor. She continued, in a mildly didactic vein,

'I am afraid people often miss their way by not viewing their chastisements as direct discipline from a Father's hand.'

This must have been a quotation, as well as what followed; there was such a decided flavour of print about both.

'Direct discipline, not something that happens by chance. It is a great mistake to try to explain them away by natural causes. We lose half their value when we



cease to view them as personal. It is so beautifully put in this little book.'

And Seline drew out 'Crumbs of Comfort' from the pile of books on the table. It had been a quotation, then.

'You see I have marked the passage. Dear Mr. Newbury gave me the book—in fact, it is one which he compiled himself, and if you should like a few I am sure he would supply you. I had been passing through a season of great trial, and was so terribly depressed, and I took up the book as if by accident. Of course it was not accident, but a special interposition; and you see I found the very thing which I needed.'

'Oh! then you *did* think,' I remarked, 'that your chastisement, or whatever it was, had come to you because you had been wicked. That seems to be the gist of the passage, so far as I can make out.'

Seline heaved a little sigh of despair.



‘Oh! Marjorie dear, how difficult it is to make you understand. It was not myself at all. I had been thinking about poor Mr. Berrithorne, and that dreadful upset at St. Aidan’s, and the sale of the furniture, and people talking about his extravagance, and it really was too much for me. You know I have such a sympathetic nature, and this little book explained it all so sweetly. That was the way the discipline came to him, direct from a Father’s hand, you see. It is no use rebelling. That passage was the very thing I needed. Now, whenever I am in difficulty, I fly to my knees and open one of the little books, and, whatever is brought before my view, I accept as a divine message. It is so comforting.’

‘I understand. A kind of fortune-telling, if one may so say. When Anne and I were children we had a book of quotations



from Shakespeare, numbered ; and we used to choose numbers and find them out, and the quotations were sometimes very apt. I don't think I could quite look upon that sort of thing as a divine message, though.'

'Certainly not, if it came from Shakespeare,' replied Seline, rather severely. 'I consider him unsatisfactory. Mr. Newbury says I had better keep to the simple word and testimony, and I find it quite sufficient. I must have him come whilst you are here. Indeed, I am surprised he has not been already. He is generally so very attentive. He knows I am so dependent upon him. I fly to him in all my difficulties. He is such a comfort to me. So different to poor dear Mr. Berrithorne. Oh! what an interposition it was that Providence removed him from St. Aidan's before I had become too much hardened by his worldly teachings and example.



Have I not been led by a wonderful way,  
Marjorie?’

She really had, but I had not yet been able to discover that it was the right way. However, just then Mr. Newbury himself was announced, and I was spared further conversation.



## CHAPTER XVII.

MR. NEWBURY was a well-intentioned man, quite earnest in his own way, quite sincere in his admiration of the wonderful effects which his ministrations had produced in one who so lately had been entirely given over to the world. He had no ends of his own to serve. He simply followed what he took to be a leading from above.

I think, also, he must have been singularly unselfish and patient, or he could not have placed himself so entirely at Seline's command, waited upon her with such unremitting readiness, devoted hour after



hour to the consideration of her spiritual needs, listened with unflagging attention to every minute detail of her religious experience. I could see from the beginning that to him it was all a reality. He looked for no secondary causes. He would have been deeply grieved had anyone suggested that physical weakness had produced, or that a return of physical vigour would in any way affect, that curious mental condition by which the self-centre, once fixed in material things, had been transferred to things spiritual.

The demands which Seline made upon him must at times have been very inconvenient. As a fidgetty patient keeps sending for a doctor, and describing all the variations of his ailment, so she summoned him whenever her own incessant self-inspection culminated in an attack of depression. It was tears first, a glass of



invalid port next, and then Mr. Newbury ; and I must say that his patience far exceeded that of Dr. Ratisbone, who, being a busy man, often cut short, with what Seline considered cruel abruptness, the lengthy details into which she so much enjoyed entering.

I had once asked this Dr. Ratisbone about her. He said there was nothing organically the matter. She only lived too much upon her emotions. She did not possess a vigorous constitution. She had no mental resources. She was dependent upon excitement of one kind or other. Fashionable amusements had once been enough for her. Most likely, when she became a little stronger, they would be enough for her again. This absorption of the mind in so-called religious matters was simply a development, to a greater extent, and in a more noticeable direction,



of her natural tendency to be her own centre. It was entirely artificial, as much so as the state induced by magnetic passes, and probably now as little under her own control. Responsibility, Dr. Ratisbone said, was a difficult subject to deal with. One might define the limits at which society had a right to make it cease for the individual's safety, but the causes which led to the gradual breaking down of it were far to seek, and lost themselves in a mist of metaphysics. He could only say Mrs. Forrester's condition was a very trying one for all her friends, and he hoped, both for their sakes and her own, she would get out of it as soon as possible.

For my own part I thought the friends had the worst of it. Seline was not by any means unhappy. There was a mild self-complacency about her which must have been very comfortable. It was not herself



who had ever done wrong, it was other people. She looked upon chastisements, visitations, and discipline from quite an impersonal point of view. It was improving and interesting to observe how they invariably followed upon the sins and shortcomings of her friends, almost as if for her own special edification. Indeed, I really think Seline was under the impression that all human nature, external to herself, was a kind of picture-gallery or panorama, got up for her private instruction; grouped, coloured, made to move or stand still, as might be necessary and convenient for the observations she wanted to make.

‘But then,’ as she said to me that morning after Mr. Newbury had gone, ‘you know, Marjorie dear, mine is such a peculiar case. No one has ever seen anything like it before. Dr. Ratisbone says himself he does not know what to pre-



scribe for me. He says I am not fit for strong measures; quinine, and things of that sort, are not of the slightest use. He wants to get me away from home, but I would not be out of reach of Mr. Newbury for the world. You see it is the soul's physician that I need. Poor Dr. Ratisbone knows nothing about it. He is entirely a man of the world, and cannot enter into that which is spiritually discerned. But dear Mr. Newbury knows. Were you not struck with him?'

‘Well, yes. I think he is a thoroughly well-meaning man. He wishes to do good. He is a man whose motives I should respect.’

‘Oh, dear, yes; and such spiritual insight. He says he has spent days and nights in considering my case. He has never met with anything of the kind before, though he has had great experi-



ence in religious life. He says it is so entirely new to him that he has made it the subject of correspondence with friends at a distance, so as to have the benefit of their opinion on the matter. Only think of that! He says sometimes that he scarcely feels himself competent to deal with such a remarkable manifestation of progress in divine things. You see, I think most of his congregation are people of quite the poorer sort, and that naturally makes a difference. One does not expect anything remarkable from them.'

'If they are poor people, Seline, I should think you might help them a little,' I suggested. 'Even if you cannot find out any way of doing it personally, Mr. Newbury would be glad of your help under his directions. A clergyman's hands are so often tied for want of means, and indiscriminate charity does more



harm than good. Now, as he does so much for you, could you not ask if you could be useful to him in some way, amongst the poor of his congregation?’

Still it was no use. Self, self. And now that perpetual self came to the front in a new manifestation.

‘No, Marjorie, I do not feel myself called to anything of that sort. I am a passive instrument. It is sweet to feel that nothing is required of me, but to suffer and endure. And it will not be for long. You know, as I said before, Mr. Newbury feels convinced that I am one specially marked out for early removal. Something within tells me that I shall soon lay down this earthly life, with all its toils and cares.’

Seline wept a little at this prospect.

‘It is touching, is it not,’ she continued, ‘to be taken so young? Mr. Newbury



says he shall have a notice of me inserted in the magazine to which he frequently contributes. So that, you see, I may be the means of doing much good. I told him he might make whatever use he liked of my private papers and diaries. Of course I keep a diary now. I should like to read you an extract or two some time. Mr. Newbury advised me to make a record of my thoughts and feelings. He said, being a peculiar case, they would be very interesting. But it will soon be all over.'

Seline lay back, and shut her eyes.

Presently she opened them, and gave a little twitch.

'The brandy, Marjorie. Oh! fly for the brandy, or it will be too late.'

I flew. That is to say, I fetched it as quickly as I could. Seline took some, then lay back again on the couch.

'I am going, Marjorie,' she said, calmly.



‘It has come at last. Tell Mr. Newbury he will find all the papers in my desk. And say good-bye to all my friends. So very weak and sinking. But I have no fears.’

Neither had I, though the breakdown was unexpected. People do not die of nothing in that way, with their pulses and tongues all right, and the colour on their cheeks as usual. I opened the doors and windows, let her have plenty of fresh air, scolded her vigorously for ‘giving way,’ and in half-an-hour she was able to partake of a tolerably substantial lunch, though protesting all the while that it was with difficulty she could swallow a mouthful.

‘It is only for your sake, Marjorie, that I am making an effort. I know you will be so distressed, if I am not able to keep up my strength. And very inconvenient too, if anything happens when Michael is



away from home. But I did feel so blessedly near the eternal world. I felt as if it was cruel of you to bring me back to this transitory scene.'

'Then, why did you ask for the brandy,' I inquired, 'if you did not want to be blessedly far off from the eternal world again? Oh! come, Seline, now, do be common-sensible. I believe you have a very great deal more to do before you are fit for anything but the present state of existence. You had much better let Mr. Forrester find you looking bright and cheerful when he comes home, and ready to take an interest in all the useful work he is doing. That will be ten times more religious than writing diaries, and it will be next door to doing something yourself, because it will help him to do it more easily.'

But, by way of reply to that, Seline only went to sleep.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

THAT week wore itself to a close. I went to the college-house upon Thursday. Mr. Forrester was to return on the following Wednesday, so that I should have seen him for a few hours. However, on the Tuesday evening, there came a telegram to say that he should be detained another day. Seline did not ask me to extend my visit over that day, nor did I wish to do so.

I think never sailor, after stormy, tedious voyage, longed for port as I longed for the sight of Aunt Sunshine's bonnet, and the little pony-carriage on the slope



of the hill road from Burstborough to the college. I sat up at my own room window and watched for them, and, when they came in view, I could have laughed for very gladness. To be home again ; it was a good joy.

Seline, still lying on her couch in the drawing-room, and still looking as fascinating as ever in dashes and touches of yellow, kissed me affectionately, and said she should not forget to pray for me. I could have wished that she had not forgotten to be truthful for me, once upon a time, but it was no use saying anything about that. If she *had* been truthful, perhaps she would not have had such a pretty home now to be religious in.

And, after all, would I have changed places with her? A thousand times no.

Aunt Sunshine, always true to her promises, declined to come in. The pony could



not be left, either. And Mrs. Forrester was of course too delicate to come into the hall and make personal enquiries touching her Willoughby friends. Nay, even she did not come to the window to give us a wave of the hand as we departed. I turned, for I have a childish love of last looks, but I saw only the lovely lace curtains, artistically looped back with embroidered bands of old gold satin, and a magnificent crimson azalea glowing like a sunset cloud where the curtains parted. Nothing more than that.

Such a curious feeling came over me as we drove away. I was able to ask decently about my mother and the rest of the Willoughby people just at first, and then it was as though all the present became dark, and the past only was real. I saw so plainly all that might have been. From the dreadful strain and constraint of the



week I had escaped into freedom, but it was freedom that seemed almost pain, like the pricking and tingling of a limb in which the blood begins to circulate again after long pressure. I only knew by that pain how deadly had been the tightening hold of those weary days. And, if deadly for me, what must it be for him?

I do not know if Aunt Sunshine spoke to me. If she did I never heard her. And I never saw the primroses by the roadside as we got away from Burstborough, nor heard the larks sing up in the sunshine. It was as though I were living a life under water, all the life that lay far away, pressed down, hidden, killed, years ago by that one little lie which Seline Consett had told about me to Mr. Forrester. The circumstances of it came back to me so vividly: that drive with Aunt Sunshine to Stilbury, the meeting with Mr. Forrester; the beauty



and gladness of that summer day in the quaint old market-town; the dawn, as it seemed, of a gladness that could never die, the time of the singing of birds come to me; the drive home in the early evening, that quiet leisurely drive in which I said so little and thought so much, content in myself, able to say, 'It is enough. I am happy now.'

And the slow cruel fading away of it all, and not for any wrong that I had done. The gradual breaking in upon me of the truth that I had been mistaken; the misery, the humiliation, the proud turning back into myself; the cold aching hunger of those seven days. And Seline so bright all the time, my shadow her sunshine. Then that half-hour in the church, one lightning flash of joy smiting between the past and the future; the beautiful, awful truth which must hence-



forth make life so different for us ; the deep, deep waters through which we must each of us carry our burden to the other side. But Heaven's own brightness upon those waters still, and Heaven's peace waiting for us when they were overpassed.

All this I saw and lived through again. I do not know how long we had been riding in silence through that pleasant bit of country in the April afternoon, when Aunt Sunshine peeped round under my hat and said, in her half-bantering, half-serious way,

‘ Well, Marjorie, done with being quiet yet ? ’

Her dear old voice brought me back to the present. Once more I felt myself closed round by a loving kindness upon which no speck of falsehood had ever rested. True, true as her own name, and as unfailing and as life-giving.



Ah, auntie,' I said, 'it *has* been a dreary time.'

'My child, I knew it by the look of you, as soon as ever you came out to me. You have been living at the bottom of a well, and I am sorry for you. What is it, then? Religious depression, I suppose.'

'Well, no. I should rather call it religious self-complacency. But it comes to about the same thing, so far as other people are concerned. All the world for you, and you for yourself.'

'A bad compendium of philosophy. If there is a more dreary thing than moping over one's shortcomings, it is looking at one's own excellences through a magnifying-glass, and expecting everyone else to do the same. Poor thing!'

'Is that "poor thing" for Seline, aunt, or for me?'

'Oh, for you, my dear. If Mrs. Forres-



ter thinks so well of herself, she does not need any sympathy of mine. I rather fancy, though, that the second-master of Burstborough grammar-school wants it more than either of you.'

And then we were silent again. Jessie jogged along at her own pace, a very slow one, through the pleasant country lanes, gay now with primroses and the just breaking bloom of the wild hyacinths; and sometimes through bits of plantation where the green at the larch-tree roots was flecked with daffodils, each golden blossom like a separate sharp pain to me now; and sometimes through open meadows, where the lambs played and we saw the rabbits popping and leaping amongst the molehills. And at last the grey tower of Willoughby church came in sight above the yew-trees, and we could see the smoke from Mrs. Dumble's chimney; only one to smoke



now, poor Mrs. Dumble! since the gentlemen were otherwise provided for. And far away, past the Hall, on the rising ground towards Stilbury, the gables of Newcourt, red and warm amongst the budding elm-trees.

‘There is never any ending of life,’ said Aunt Sunshine, half in an undertone, as though winding up for herself some train of thought which she had been following as we rode along in silence. ‘Never any ending. It seems to be always only a beginning.’

‘And a failure,’ I added, dismally.

‘No,’ said auntie. ‘Not a failure, never quite a failure.’

As she said that, Rowland Berrithorne came out of Mrs. Bolton’s cottage, for we had wound up the slope of the moor hill now, and were beginning to descend into the village.



We were only going at a foot's pace, so he joined us, walking all the way down the hill, telling us very simply about his work, and how they were getting on at the brick-fields. Even now he rarely came into the village. The little mission-room at the fields was given over into his charge. He was content to live his life amongst the rough and lowly people there.

And it was not a failure any more. One could tell now, by his very step, by the quiet, purpose-like look in his face, by his words, steady in their guarded control, that if life was still only a beginning, it was a beginning towards a good ending. If the actual seed-germ of character had not changed, all the elements of its nurture had been so altered, all its conditions so modified, that its development would be to all intents and purposes new. He had come out of himself. He had seen how



small a part fine words can play in the real work of human growth ; how, to enter into life, one must become as a little child. He, too, casting himself into that once so despised corner of the vineyard, and doing his daily stint of toil there, with no honour and no praise, did indeed sell all that he had, and, selling it, had found his true manhood.

So home again. And, being once more at peace there, it seemed to me I should never want to leave it, for truly no fireside could be to me now like our own, nor any content like that which, in the quiet years to come, I might build up for myself beside it.



## CHAPTER XIX.

AFTER my return from the college house I had several letters from Seline. They were very much like her conversation, always about herself, her frames and feelings, what Mr. Newbury had said about her rapidly-maturing graces, short extracts from her diaries which she thought might interest me, names of various books of the corn and oil style, which she wished me to read. She told me she thought she should not be long in this world, but she had still no fears, she was quite prepared whenever the summons came. She had only to lay



down this weary world and enter upon life eternal. She hoped she was being made of some little use to those around her, by telling them of the very great peace she had found. She felt it was such a mercy to have been plucked from the dangers which surrounded her in such a worldly atmosphere as that of St. Aidan's; she could not be sufficiently thankful for such a minister as Mr. Newbury, and she thought she was really a blessing to him also, for he said it was quite a privilege to be allowed to come so frequently and converse with her on the things of the kingdom.

I was not able to write, any more than to speak, with much sympathetic interest on these topics, and therefore our correspondence soon languished. I then ceased to hear directly of or from her. Anne went over to Burstborough occasionally,



and in that way I used to hear how things were going on. As the warm weather advanced her health improved very much. Once, when Anne and I were on a shopping expedition, we met Dr. Ratisbone, who stopped and told us about her. He said he thought she would soon be all right again. Her system was gathering tone. She was gradually shaking off her morbid condition of mind. She was going over to Paris in the summer holidays with Mr. Forrester, and that, no doubt, would quite set her up. She had passed through a troublesome phase, but one by no means uncommon to persons of finely-strung, excitable temperament. She might, without care, be liable to it again from time to time, but it would not, if wisely guarded against and watched over, lead to anything serious. It was really more troublesome for other people than for herself.



Anne went to call upon her just before this Paris visit. She said she was much more like the Seline of old times. For one thing, Mr. Newbury had removed to a church in London. I think he had carried a good deal of her religion with him. Seline's religion reminded me very much of the mustard and cress we used to sow when we were children, upon a bottle covered with wet flannel. It was rather poor stuff, and very dependent upon the flannel. When Mr. Newbury went away the flannel departed, and the mustard and cress came to grief.

Seline herself did not mourn his loss so much as one might have expected. I think her spiritual appetite had begun to fail before his removal to a more important sphere of duty. He handed her over, as a remarkably interesting case, to his successor, but she gave up her connection



with the church when he left, and began to attend St. Luke's, the next best fashionable church to St. Aidan's, where she was much made of, both by the vicar and his wife, as a wandering sheep returning to the fold. Anne did not hear anything about the little books of devotion which used to be so precious. I inquired particularly about the windmill table and its contents. Anne could not speak decidedly as to the underneath part, but the top was again supplied, as in days of old, by novels from the circulating library; and Seline was more ready to talk about them than about the wheat and honey and crumbs which had once possessed so much interest for her.

Then came the visit to Paris, which completely restored her health and spirits. As she had called upon us to say good-bye before she went, we felt it our duty



to go and congratulate her upon her safe return.

She was no longer the Seline of that dreary Easter visit. There was a quite new air of dash and style about her. She asked us if we would like to see the new dresses she had bought. She showed us lovely hats and bonnets, told us what pleasant attentions she had received,—for through Mrs. Macallister, with whom she still kept up an occasional correspondence, they had obtained introductions to a few good families, and had been asked to some very pretty balls, besides ‘at homes’ and receptions, which of course had made all the difference. But the crown and summit of her delight was a Venetian costume which she was intending to wear at a fancy-dress ball in the autumn. It was copied from one of Titian’s paintings in the Louvre, a marvel of glimmering silk, rosy, shot with



purple, and lace and pearls and flashes of white satin shining through here and there, and a girdle of old Venetian goldsmith's work, and a jewelled net for the hair.

‘You know,’ she said, ‘there is always a fancy ball here now, in November, and Michael said I might have it if I liked. I believe Dr. Ratisbone told him he had better not cross me in anything, so I have rather a successful time of it. If you want your own way, Marjorie, have an attack upon the nerves. Everyone will be only too glad to let you have it then.’

I said I was not sure whether the game would be worth the candle.

‘Oh! I don’t know. You may as well take it in one way as in another. I believe I was a dreadful nuisance to him last spring, and he was glad to do anything for a quiet life. But it is a lovely dress, is it



not? The Burstborough people will be imitating it all over the place, which will make the real thing look all the better. I never think I have succeeded in anything until other people try to do it and fail. I thought I would have something massive this time, though as a rule, you know, I do not consider that it suits my style so well as lightness. I shall never have a better success than my dragon-fly costume last autumn. Everybody raved about it, but it doesn't do to repeat oneself. Let me see.'

And Seline looked thoughtfully out through the beautiful lace curtains into the garden.

'I have been a dragon-fly, and a firefly, and a butterfly, and a wasp, and a praying mantis, and I could not strike out anything else in that line, so I thought I had better make quite a fresh start. Did



you ever see a praying mantis, Anne?’

Anne confessed she had not.

‘It is the loveliest pale-green creature, and is a charming idea for a slender figure. Then, of course, everyone asks what it is, and so you get looked at more. My mantis was a great success, but I think I shall do quite as well in this exquisite Venetian thing. I have shown it to no one yet, and you must not say anything about it for fear of its being copied before the time.’

When we had duly admired the dress, I ventured to ask if anything was ever heard now of Mr. Newbury.

Seline gave a ludicrous little shrug, which spoke volumes, and she put her two hands together and looked like a naughty child who is going to be punished.

‘Oh, Marjorie, don’t. Poor, dear man! I am so ashamed of myself sometimes when I think what heaps of trouble I used



to give him. He was so good about it too, always came trotting over with little books and comforting texts, and that sort of thing. I am rather glad he has gone to London, for it would have been so awkward to keep coming across him now that the religious craze has gone off. Funny, wasn't it ?'

'Very, indeed,' I replied.

'Ah, I see you are chaffing me. But I do think you must have had a lively time with me. I believe I made them all wish I was in my grave. Dear little Mr. Newbury was the only one who always seemed equal to the occasion. But let us have some tea. It is really too amusing to think about it.'

We had some, and came away. Dr. Ratisbone had been quite right then !

The fancy ball took place in November. A day or two afterwards Seline presented



new colours to the Burstborough volunteers, and that was the occasion of a second grand display. Then at the end of the month there was to be the Hunt Ball, and the County Ball, and there were to be some amateur theatricals for the new hospital wing, and in these, too, Seline was to take part. Her religious craze seemed only to have inspired her with fresh energy for the pursuit of social distinction.

It was with a thrill of horrified surprise then that, not a week after the presentation of the volunteer colours, we read in the death column of the *Times* the following brief announcement:

‘November the 19th, aged twenty-six, Seline, wife of Michael Forrester, of Burstborough.’

Later on we heard further particulars. The night of that fancy-dress ball was wet



and stormy. She had waited long in the portico of the Assembly Rooms for her carriage, and had taken cold. But she would not give up the presenting of the colours, and the dance which followed it. That increased the chill, but still no one thought there was any danger. Even Dr. Ratisbone was quite unprepared for anything serious. She would not herself own that she was ill at all, but went on making arrangements for a ball which she meant to give at the college house after Christmas. Quite suddenly a change came. There was hurry, bustle, alarm, sending hither and thither for physicians; sharp, racking pain for a little while, then unconsciousness, and then the end.

What after that, I wondered. What sort of existence was possible for her when that which has its end and aim in self had



passed? What had she to begin the other life with, and what could that other life be worth to her?

If there are souls that, planet-like, have their ordered courses round the great central sun, and fulfil in grand obedience the laws which make them part of the Divine system, are there others which flash like comets, suddenly, and without, as it seems, any guiding hand, across the circles of the universe, and wasting only, dealing mischief only, wander away and are seen no more? It may be so.



## CHAPTER XX.

AFTER that, the days went quietly for us all at Willoughby.

We were at peace amongst ourselves. Rowland Berrithorne, with his wife and little Phyllis, still lived at the rectory with Mr. Carlton. Anne had now a baby boy whom they named David. I think, in the sunshine of home love and content, Anne's nature expanded as much as her husband's did in the wholesome shelter of obscurity. The happiness of a loving woman told its story upon her face. The lines of care and bitterness which Burst-



borough had written there, gradually faded away. She seemed to me younger than ever she had been since her marriage. God was restoring to her, as He does to all His patient and trustful children, the years which the locust had eaten.

David Carlton alone was unchanged. Such as he was when he first came among us, such he was when for five years his influence had been quietly growing and spreading in the place. During all that time I do not think the breath of gossip ever so much as passed over the fine gold of his character. There was a strange separateness about him. He was amongst us, but not of us. I think the commonest-minded person could not be with him for ten minutes without feeling the influence of his very holy and spotless life. All could take their sorrows to him; sorrows of death, sorrows of life which are some-



times harder to bear than those of death, and be sure of the warm, tender touch of sympathy upon the wound. They could take their joys too, and meet the ready smile of loving-kindness ; their cares and worries, and have them lightened if not removed, by that unfailing common-sense, that wise humour, which seemed to take the sting out of vexations and the sharpness out of trial.

I think perhaps one reason of this was his own large experience. He had not lived a shut-up college life. He had gone out very much into the world, had, like his Master, received sinners and eaten with them. This had given him a hold upon human nature which no book-learning, no Greek and Hebrew scholarship could ever have won. I do not think, after all, that the world will be converted by double firsts and senior wranglers. I do not



think that the same set of men will ever hand on the torch of learning and that of social progress. Most likely the Oxford dons forgot that David Carlton's name had ever been written in the books of their university, and certainly science would make no mourning when he died. But I am well sure that his life, whether lived in the slums of East-end London or amongst the quiet folk of Willoughby, was as a pure river of water, giving strength to all who came to drink at it, and making fresh and fair the country through which it flowed.

But with his own personal life no stranger intermeddled. Giving much, he asked for nothing in return. I never saw a man so strangely independent of human companionship. He was always ready to speak a kind word or do a kind action, but he never made any demands upon



other people. He was more content to be let alone than to be waited upon. Even Mrs. Dumble found this out.

‘Law! Miss Marjorie,’ she said, ‘he’s a man that takes a precious little to make him comfortable, is Mr. Carlton. Never wants a gentleman to come in and sit with him of a night, same as Mr. Berrithorne had used to when he occupied the apartments. And when the poor folks brings their bothers and suchlike, never any hurrying of them away, and getting done with it, but asks them in and lets ’em sit down and out with what they’ve got to say, as I tell him sometimes it’s a shame a gentleman like him should be took up that way. But Mr. Carlton you can’t say him nay, no, not if it was ever so. What he will do, he *will* do, and it’s till doomsday you may talk, you’ll be only where you were to start with. And for the little



children. Law! but he *is* one for the little children, Miss Marjorie; catches 'em up and plays with 'em, and makes 'em as you can't hardly get 'em to come away from him. I never seed anyone like our Rose Edith for the store she sets by him; goes and stands at the road end a-waiting and a-watching when she thinks he's to go by, and if it's only a smile he gives her, why, she's happy with it all day long.'

That was very like David Carlton, courteous alike to rich and poor, patient with all who came to him for counsel in their smallest cares; and having that tender love for little children which is never wanting in the heart of a true man.

I said those days were peaceful days, but it was peace upon which the shadows inseparable from all human brightness must sooner or later fall. In the late summer of the second year following poor



Seline's strangely sudden death, Aunt Sunshine's visible presence passed out of our midst. I say her visible presence, for, as with my father, we could never feel that she was far away from any of us, though we could no longer reach out to clasp her hand, or listen for the kindly voice which had for so many years been as the music of our home.

We had no warning of the end. She was bright, busy, active as usual, full of plans for the convenience of other people. This time it was a little invalid girl from one of the Burstborough slums, who was to be brought to the cottage and nursed back to as much strength as would enable her to go out to service again. How full of interest Aunt Sunshine was about it all. How she trotted up and down, gathering together things to make the chamber bright and pleasant for the poor little



lass, who had scarcely ever seen a green field or smelled the sweetness of a rose. She had nearly finished it all, put up the gay-coloured window-curtains, set a plant of geranium in the casement, put a Bible beside it—always a Bible for the poor folk who came to her to be comforted—and then she sat down for awhile to rest, and her eyelids drooped, and a change came over her face, and we saw that paralysis had smitten her.

After a very few hours of unconsciousness, the good, loving soul went home to God. She could not have had a better way of going. There was no pain of parting, no bodily anguish, no fear which hath torment: just a sudden hush, and a waking into the better life. So quietly she lay when it was all over, we could have thought she only slept.

We could not shut the sunshine out



from her, even when she rested in her own chamber, with the white flowers of death upon her breast. So we unclosed the curtains and let the warm light pour in through the open window, golden sweet with its message from the land where they need no sun. She would have had it so, if we could have asked her. Never any closed shutters for Aunt Sunshine, never any gloom nor complaining; death only a passing onward, an incident in the soul's life.

It was whilst that chamber was not yet quite empty that my mother and I went out into the garden in the pleasant August afternoon, and sat together under the beech-tree, our summer parlour, as we called it, where we could see the open window of auntie's room. How many a time, in these last years, had we all three sat there together when the green leaves



rustled over us as now, and the shadows lay, cross-barred with brightness on the grass, and the saucy little finches and willow-tits came hopping, chirping almost to our feet. They came now, peeped up at us out of the long grass, then flew away, and one alighted on the vine-branch outside the open window, singing aloud for very gladness. It was better so.

My mother spoke to me much that afternoon of their early life in the old home at Newcourt. We could see Newcourt as we sat there, just one stack of its tall clustered chimneys over the elm-trees. Since my father's death, her thoughts had often gone back to the past. Many an afternoon have we sat there under that old beech-tree, Aunt Sunshine with us, she and my mother talking of the days when they were children together, and the pranks they used to play, and the



stories they used to tell on winter evenings in the wainscotted nursery, and the birthday frolics, and the Christmas merry-makings, when my grandfather, in periwig and powder, and my grandmother, stately in long-waisted stomacher and elbow-ruffles, used to lead off Sir Roger de Coverley with the children and the servants in the hall, Jonathan Dumble's father, who was church clerk in those days, playing the fiddle, and winding up the dance always with 'God save the King,' master and mistress, men and maidens, all standing and singing it together.

Then my grandmother's tea-parties, always a certain number in the summer, and again a certain number in the winter, when the ladies used to come in chaises and gigs from the quiet country houses round about, with their caps, wondrous and



lofty structures at that time, carefully done up in bandboxes, and their mittens, and their embroidered kerchiefs, and their high-heeled shoes, all to be put on with due care and neatness in the best lodging room, Jonathan's eldest sister, who was housemaid at Newcourt then, fastening in the pins, and arranging the kerchiefs, and tying the sandals, and standing on a 'buffet' to spread out the bows at the tops of the caps; and then watching, with silent respect written upon her face, as the guests, giving final little glances and touches to their own toilettes, stepped slowly down the slippery, bees-waxed stairs, and made such deliberately graceful curtsies at the open drawing-room door, before going in to shake hands with my mother. People had time to do everything in those days; time to enjoy their tea-parties, time to think; time to re-



member, and time to be quiet. Time to be happy, too, I think, as they scarcely have now.

How quaint this all seemed to me as I listened to it, sometimes my mother, sometimes Aunt Sunshine telling the story, as we sat under the beech-tree on the lawn. It was like looking at pictures in some very old magazine, or fingering the faded brocades and keepsakes, relics of long-ago dead people, which were still treasured in locked drawers here and there over the house. There was such a halo, too, of leisureliness and dignity and simplicity about it all. And my mother and Aunt Sunshine, little children, only the two of them in that big old gabled house amongst the elm-trees, what odd little figures they must have looked, in their short waists and their shoulder puffs, and their tight



petticoats with flounces round the bottom, and their coral beads and their hair close cut over their foreheads, as nurse brought them down, before tea was over, to make their own curtseys, with such deliberateness as was possible to them, before the ladies in the drawing-room. I could fancy it so well; my mother, dark-eyed, quiet, with a certain grave dignity about her even at seven years old; and Aunt Sunshine, with her laughing blue eyes, and hair so golden-brown, and shy little ways, yet dashed with a touch of sauciness; for they said she could always find something to say for herself, though she would drop her pretty eyelids and hang her head over it.

And now, and now; there was the open window, and the bird outside singing merrily in the sunshine. And amongst those drawers that contained the faded



brocades and cherished keepsakes we had searched and found that white shawl with the Indian pattern down one side of it, the shawl which Aunt Sunshine always used to take out and wear for just one week in August, then put it carefully away till the next year. Finding it, we did as she had bade my mother long ago, and it was folded round her, not to be put off again. Oh, life that had taken away so much! Oh, death! was death giving it back again?

These sweet old pictures of the past I had looked at many a time since we had come to live at the cottage. But this afternoon my mother told me more of the later days, when she and Aunt Sunshine had grown up into girlhood together in that simple country home. Days when they had begun to dream their dreams and to see their visions of what life might be.



And it was in the spring of the year, when the chestnut-trees down the long avenue were in the first whiteness of their blossom, that my father, watching those white blossoms fall upon her hair, told my mother of his love, and won her promise to be his wife. He had waited long and patiently, and she could not say him nay.

And in the same time of the blossoming chestnuts in the long avenue, another came, my father's college friend, came courting too, and won Aunt Sunshine's love, Aunt Sunshine, with her simple country ways, and he so clever, with so much of the world's ambition about him. He won her love, waiting not so long nor so patiently for it; for auntie, quick in everything, quickly gave what she had to give, and once given she left it there. It was not the way of the Newcourts to change.



And then my mother was silent awhile. Still the birds sang, still the beech-tree leaves rustled over our heads, still the scent of the roses blew from the trellised porch ; still upon the lichens on the grey church tower the August sun smote warm and golden, and we could hear in the distance the voices of the reapers, for the harvest had begun already in the fields on the southern slope of the hill, where the corn ripened earliest. On our hills, the hills past the church, away towards Burstborough, it would wave yellow in the sunshine for well on to a month yet. And there was the open window, the little bird singing on the vine branch outside it. And within——

No, not Aunt Sunshine within. She was nearer to us than that, if we could but have known it, if we could but have felt it. How strange it was, we there in



the afternoon glow, but no voice of hers any more, no hand to clasp, no word to tell us how or where, now. And yet that little room not *quite* empty yet.

‘But there is more than that,’ I said, going back to my mother’s story of the old days at Newcourt and my father’s patient waiting, and the other waiting, not so long.

‘Yes, there is more,’ my mother said. ‘For awhile we were all very happy together. I do not know which of us two was the happier. There was never a summer so bright as that summer at Newcourt. Towards autumn, a young girl came to stay with us. She was handsome and gay and fashionable. She knew all about town life and town ways. We seemed so dull and tame beside her.’

Yes, I knew then how it would be. Such a one as Seline, bright-winged,



bright-eyed, and with no heart at all, had come flashing down into the old house among the elm-trees. Oh, Aunt Sunshine ! But I said nothing, only drew a little closer to my mother. And she went on :

‘Aunt Sunshine and I were to have been married together, that following spring, when the chestnuts were in blossom again. But instead, there was only one wedding, and that was your father’s and mine.’

‘Yes, I thought so. And the one who turned away for Seline—I mean the one who should have married Aunt Sunshine ?’

‘He is the Bishop of Burstborough now. He has had a very prosperous career, and his wife, the girl who came to stay with us so many years ago at Newcourt, is very popular too. He was clever and he had influential friends, and they say he is a very good bishop. I sometimes think that



was why he did not go all the length Lady Matilda wished about Rowland Berri-thorne. He could scarcely have done it, things being as they were in the past.'

And then there fell a silence between us again. How many things were clear to me now. How well I could understand Aunt Sunshine's feeling about Seline. How vividly came back to me that afternoon, years before, when we had watched the tennis-players on the lawn! the touch, almost of sharpness in her voice. And she had looked away from them to the old home, and she had remembered it all.

That was why she had never stepped, a bride, side by side with my mother under the blossoming chestnuts; never a bride for all the beauty and brightness of her youth. But she lived a quiet life, seeing those she loved die one by one until she was left, as some would say, a lonely



woman here in this little cottage by the church. And he, out of whose unfaith had been wrought the fine steadfastness of her character, had prospered well, and rebuked those who were not so prudent, for the error of their ways.

It was all strange. And strangest of all the open window, and the great, solemn silence within. But I said to myself, over and over again :

‘Not Aunt Sunshine within. Not Aunt Sunshine.’

My mother’s arm was round me. Unconsciously we had drawn closely and more closely together, there in the stillness of that August afternoon. And if my tears had fallen they must have fallen upon her hand. I do not know if she read my thoughts as we looked together upon that grave of the past, where other than the love she told me of lay buried. But after



that my mother and I seemed nearer and dearer to each other than before ; we two out of all the world.

The funeral was next afternoon. Still the sun was bright as ever, and the birds sang their loudest. There was no pomp and ceremony, no black train of mourners. My mother and I, Anne and her husband, stood there, all round and about us the graves of the Newcourt people. David Carlton read the few and simple words with which our church takes her earthly farewell of those who now need nothing more that she can give.

But it was not Aunt Sunshine whom we laid there, under blossoms white and sweet enough for any bride, not Aunt Sunshine. No, the little room was empty, and the grave empty too, and she was with us, very near to us, if we could but have



known it. I could not weep. I could scarcely, like that disciple of old, stoop down and look into the sepulchre. I could only close my eyes and feel the sunshine and hear the laughing song of the little birds, and say to myself,

‘She is very near.’

As we turned to come away, some one, not of ourselves, stepped to the edge of the grave, and let fall into it a shower of white rose-leaves. I only saw the outstretched hand as I turned away, but I knew it was the hand of Michael Forrester.

Then we came back, my mother and I, to the cottage garden, and sat under the beech-tree. It seemed as if there, in the sunshine, we were nearer to those who had passed for awhile out of our sight. There was the open window, there, almost



as near to us, the open grave. But here, close beside us, the two whose eyes were not like ours, holden.

As we thought and were sad, I heard the wicket-gate between the garden and the church gently opened, and Mr. Forrester came in.

I had not seen him face to face for years, scarcely since that evening when we stood together for a while by the font in the church. I noticed now that he was much changed. He had lost his fine, erect bearing; his hair was turning grey. He had the look—one can perceive it so instantly—of a man whose life lies rather in the past than the future. Still there was that in his face which told of strong, resolute will, will that would go steadily on in well-doing to the end; come disappointment, or come success, not one or



the other of these the goal aimed at, but only the well-doing.

He came up to us and took my mother's hand, holding it for a while; then mine, and once again we looked long, earnestly into each other's eyes. Then he said good-bye to us, and with no other word spoken went out through that other gate which led into Burstborough high-road, striking out of it by-and-by into the corn-fields, across which a path wound up the hill.

The sun smote upon those corn-fields now, and turned them to dazzling gold, swaying, rippling in the wind, as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire. And through it he toiled, with bowed shoulders and bended head, like St. Christopher in the church window. Slowly too, and with a weary step, as if the burden he carried were heavy.



I watched him until, far up on the crest of the hill, where the golden sea touched the blue of the summer sky, the narrow pathway disappeared. But I knew that beyond it, as for the saint who carried the child Christ across, there was rest.

This was years ago. We are at peace now, my mother and I.

And Michael, too.

THE END.



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